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OR,
**THE OCEAN OUTLAW'S
NEMESIS.**

**A Romance of the Mexican Gulf
and its Shores.**

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTE-
ZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE MEXICAN CAPTAIN.

"SAIL ho!"
The cry came from the lips of a sentinel,
pacing the battlements of the grim pile of rocks,
known as the Castle San Juan d' Uloa, which
guards the entrance to an anchorage off the city
of Vera Cruz, poetically called "The Iron Gates
of Mexico."

The cry of the sentinel was passed along until
it reached the ears of the officer on duty, and
taking his glass he leisurely ascended to a

"MY GOD! THEY ARE LOST!" CRIED THE BUCCANEER QUEEN, SPRINGING UPON
THE BULWARKS.

turret and gazed out over the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

There, over two leagues away, with the setting sun falling upon her white sails, was a brig, standing in toward the haven in the port of Vera Cruz.

"She is crippled, as though she had been in a combat, and she is none other than the brig-of-war of that reckless fellow Urbana, who seems to be such a pet with the Government.

"He is rich, and hence has powerful influence, and thus has the means given him to win fame and fortune.

"Well, his brig has been in action, that is certain, for I can see now that she has suffered; but where is her prize?

"Can Captain Almo Urbana have again met his match, as he did a couple of months since in his duel with that American sailor who marked him for life?

"The gallant, dashing Urbana, the envied of men and idol of the ladies, will lose his power if he has been whipped on the high seas, after his having been so cleverly handled ashore by one of those dare-devil Americans."

So mused the Mexican officer aloud, as he stood upon the turret watching the coming in of the brig-of-war, which was flying at her peak the Eagle and Serpent-flag of Mexico.

The wind was fair, but the vessel seemed in no hurry to reach port before dark, for she was under light sails only.

She was a beautiful vessel, brig-rigged, splendidly armed and looked like a new cruiser, though her appearance indicated that she had recently been in action, for her fore-topmast was shot away, her bowsprit had been newly rigged, and bulwarks and sails were scarred and torn by shot.

Darkness had fallen upon sea and shore, when she glided in past the grim old fortress, saluting sullenly with her guns, and headed for an anchorage up opposite the town in a secluded spot, as though not courting observation.

Soon after her anchor was let fall, a boat left her side, and when it reached the shore an officer wearing a cloak, for the night had come on misty and chill, sprung on shore and without a word to his crew walked rapidly up into the town.

As though acquainted perfectly with the city he made his way to where two lights burned brightly on either side of a massive portal.

Upon glass, behind which was a light, were painted in golden letters:

"MONTE CASINO."

Entering the hallway he strode up a carpeted stairway to where a man sat before a desk, reading by a light swung over his head.

"No strangers admitted, senor, without a card from— Oh! I beg pardon, Captain Urbana, but I did not recognize you," said the man on watch, as he caught sight of the face of the sailor.

"And no wonder, Jose, with this accursed scar upon my face to wear for life," was the bitter reply of the officer, who now tossed the guard his cloak, which revealed the fact that he was dressed in the uniform of a captain in the navy of Mexico.

Unbuckling his sword-belt he handed the weapon over, while the light falling upon his face revealed a cruel-looking red scar, as though from a recently received wound, running from his cheekbone downward below the jaw.

But for this disfiguring scar his face was remarkably handsome, his form erect, elegant, and his whole appearance most striking.

"Is the Senor Escalon in the *salon*, Jose?" asked the officer, as he turned to continue on up the stairway.

"Yes, Senor Captain, and many other friends who will be glad to welcome you home again, from what I hope was a successful cruise."

The officer made no reply to the kind wishes of Jose, the guard of the *salon* Monte Casino, and strode on, muttering bitterly:

"Friends! curses upon such friends as I have—fair-weather friends only!"

Opening a door, he the next moment strode into the grand Home of Luck, the Palace of Chance, lighted brilliantly, and where several hundred men were tempting the Goddess of Fortune.

Entering the *salon* with a haughty air, the officer bowed coldly to the numerous salutes that greeted him on all sides, and made his way to an adjoining room, where there were a score or more of alcoves, curtained off for private parties to play in.

"Boy, in which alcove is the Senor Escalon?" he asked the messenger in charge.

"Number thirteen, Senor Captain."

"Who is he playing with?"

"The Senor Valverde and two others, Senor Captain."

The Mexican captain strode across the room to "Number thirteen," drew back the silk curtain like one who felt that he would not be an unwelcome visitor, and entered.

"*Caramba!* it is you, Captain Urbana!" came from the lips of one of the four players at the table in the alcove, and he sprung to his feet, a strange look upon his face, as he met the piercing eyes of the intruder.

CHAPTER II.

A COMMISSIONED PIRATE.

THE coming of the Mexican captain so suddenly into the alcove had somewhat startled the party of four there, especially the one who had greeted his appearance with an oath, and who looked like a man not often caught off his guard.

He was a man with a dark, earnest face, full of intelligence and decision, and, beardless, he had the appearance of a priest, rather than what he was, the richest banker in Vera Cruz, for the name of Luis Escalon was as good as gold on any paper, or his promise either.

He was plainly dressed, but wore in his scarf a ruby of great size and beauty, and on the small finger of his left hand was its match.

The others at the table were, two of them, wealthy cattle rancheros, and the fourth a man of striking appearance.

He was above the medium height, had a face that one would have believed belonged to a poet, and a lazy languid manner that was rather fascinating than otherwise.

He was dressed exquisitely, had been educated for the church, but with too much of the Old Nick in his nature to read prayers, had gone off to seek his fortune and in a few years came to Vera Cruz, having made it, he said, in the mines.

He was known as a gambler, and few men were so fortunate in holding winning cards as was Henrico Valverde, for such was his name.

When Banker Escalon and Valverde played together they were considered a matchless pair, and yet often men were found bold enough to try their luck against them, and the two rancheros were now doing so to their cost, for they were losing heavily.

"Pardon me, senors, but I supposed I would find Banker Escalon here alone," said the officer, stepping back.

"No apology needed, Urbana, come in, and permit me to welcome you back from sea."

"A prosperous voyage, I hope," said Escalon, now perfectly cool.

"I will not disturb you now, senor, but later if you are at leisure I will call at your house," said the Mexican.

"Pray go there and wait, for I will be home within the hour, as Senor Valverde also has some business to transact with me which cannot be done here."

The Mexican bowed and left the alcove, and departing from the Casino was soon after seated in the sumptuous library of the rich young banker, with a decanter of wine, some sweet biscuit, and a box of cigars at his elbow.

After the going of Captain Urbana, Senors Escalon and Valverde both played in a *distrain* sort of way, though their luck did not desert them, and one of the rancheros said:

"I shall have to cry mercy if the next game goes against us, senors, for to-night I can play no more; but on another evening we will again tempt fortune with you."

"As you please, senors," was the reply, and soon after Escalon left the *salon*, to be followed a few minutes after by Valverde.

"I waited for you," said Senor Escalon, as Senor Valverde came along the street, and he came from a dark recess and joined him.

"What does this quick return of the Relentless mean?" asked Henrico Valverde.

"I am sure that it means some trouble, for Urbana should not have returned without orders, and his presence fairly startled me, for I was thinking of him at the moment he appeared."

"But we won largely to-night."

"Yes, those fools were very generous with their gold."

"We have a thousand each for our play; but we must be more careful and not play partners so often, for it will evoke suspicion."

"Nonsense, Valverde, I am above suspicion, and we handle marked cards too well to be caught; but here we are," and the two stopped at the door of the banker's house.

Entering the library they found the Mexican officer there awaiting them, and with no other greeting Senor Escalon said almost sharply:

"Well, Urbana, what does your return mean when you were not expected?"

The face of the officer flushed angrily, and he responded:

"I will tell you what it means when you drop that tone toward me, for I am not to be bullied, Senor Escalon, even by you."

"Pardon me, I did not so intend my words."

"Sit down and let us hear why you are in Vera Cruz, when both Valverde and myself believed you were winning fortune upon the high seas."

"Well, senor, to be explicit, I will say that when you visited the Hacienda Ravera, when I had all going my way to wed the Senorita Rachel, and had cast dishonor upon her American lover, you ordered me at once to sea, and being in debt to you, I was forced to obey."

"I understand that, senor; but I found you there, basking in the smiles of the Don's daughter, when you should have been at sea making money for Senor Valverde and myself, who own your vessel and gave you the means of retrieving your fortunes with her."

"I understand, Senor Escalon, that I had mortgaged my estates to you, and when the

Government told me that if I furnished my vessel, fully armed and equipped, that I would be commissioned as a captain, and sent upon the special service of pirate-hunting, and that when I nominally own the brig, you and Valverde paid your money for her."

"But I did suppose that once at sea I would be my own master, and so it was that I sailed for the Ravera Hacienda harborage, to win the senorita, for, as you know, she is the richest heiress in Mexico."

"I know all that, Captain Urbana, as I do that I went there to order you to sea, and now you return to Vera Cruz, I am sure having taken no prize."

"Had you not visited the hacienda I would have won Senorita Ravera as a prize, for I had convinced her that her American lover was a pirate, and was awaiting there the return of his vessel to sink her, and thus place him out of my way forever."

"But you ordered me to sea, and now I have lost the riches of the millionaire Don."

"How so?"

"I have met the American sailor, and he worsted my vessel in the combat," was the savagely uttered response of the Mexican officer.

"If you have fought that American cruiser, Captain Urbana, then you have become no more than a commissioned pirate," was the startling rejoinder of Banker Escalon.

CHAPTER III.

THE BUCCANEER.

"SENOR ESCALON, you seem to forget whom it is that you address," sternly said the Mexican officer at the words of the banker, so hotly spoken, and calling the commander of the brig-of-war a commissioned pirate.

"I forget nothing of the kind, Urbana."

"I know that you have gambled away two fortunes, and that I have protected you in your debts until men to-day, excepting Valverde and myself, believe you to be rich."

"I know that Valverde owns one-third of your brig, I the other two-thirds, which is supposed to be your vessel—owned, armed and equipped by you."

"We ventured the money to have you go to sea and capture pirates, the treasure of which would pay us, and you, largely."

"You went to the Ravera Hacienda to try and win the Don's daughter, and when I forced you to sail from there, you now run into Vera Cruz with the information that you have fought an American cruiser and been worsted by her."

"What does this mean, when Mexico is at peace with the United States, and you had only hard knocks, iron, steel and lead to get instead of gold, had you captured her?"

"Senor Escalon, I attacked the American in full view of the hacienda, when he was on his way there to prove that he was not a pirate, as I had represented him to the Don and his daughter."

"Had I sunk him with all on board I determined to report it as having engaged what I believed to be a pirate; but it would have made me a hero with the Senorita Rachel for having prevented her wedding a pirate chief, and I would have gotten her vast fortune when she became my wife."

"This would have enabled me to pay off my indebtedness to you, and still remain a man of honor before my Government and countrymen."

"As it now is, I can see no other course than to turn pirate, kidnap the Senorita Rachel, force her to wed me, and by getting rid of her father, control her fortune," was the reckless retort of the officer.

"A fine plan for you, senor; but how about Senor Valverde's share and mine?"

"Of course we are partners in the plot."

"Well, the kidnapping of the senorita may come later; but now tell your story and we will decide what is to be done first."

"Well, senors, I went on the search for the Lagoon Rovers, but was unsuccessful in making a capture, so ran inshore on the Gulf, some leagues from the Ravera Hacienda for water."

"While there my men on going ashore with the casks found a man asleep near the spring, and he proved to be a Mexican who had been one of the crew of Lamonte the Rover, but as he told me, forced to serve the pirate, having been captured on a merchant craft."

"This man reported to me that the American captain, he who gave me this wound as you both so well know, had come up with Lamonte's vessel, chased her and after a hot action captured her."

"He had sailed with the *goleta*, which you know was the Don's yacht, captured by Lamonte, to the Hacienda Harbor, but the two vessels had become separated in a storm and the prize arrived first."

"The remarkably small hands and feet of the man enabled him to slip off his irons and drop through a port into the sea, when he had swum ashore and was found asleep by my men, as I said."

"As he told me that the American schooner must soon arrive at the Hacienda Harborage, and had been crippled in her fight with La-

monte's *goleta*, I decided to attack and sink the American.

"When he was sighted standing in toward the Ravera Hacienda, I moved out to meet him and began action.

"After a fierce fight I felt that he would board and carry me, having shot away my bowsprit and foretopmast, so I ran up a white flag and sent a boat aboard to say that I had been mistaken in believing the American a pirate, having heard of her capture by Lamonte the Rover, and so supposed I was fighting that outlaw until my glass revealed the fact that I had made a grave error."

"I should think so; but one only discovered when you were being whipped."

"That man and his crew fought like demons, senior."

"Yes, and I warn you to steer clear of him in future, for he, as you know, is sent out by his Government as a pirate-hunter, and I do not care to lose the brig," said Escalon.

"Nor I, for we have too much at stake," added Senor Valverde.

"As I also have; but having met more than my match, and being crippled, I returned home to report and repair damages."

"And Captain Cecil Dare accepted your explanation?"

"Yes, but demanded that I should hoist the United States flag at the main top and salute his vessel as he sailed by."

"Which you did?"

"Of course."

"Well, he is a dangerous man, Captain Urbana, and again I urge you to steer clear of him; but the Government will not accept your explanation."

"Then I am ruined!"

"You certainly are, and I see but one course for you to pursue."

"And what is that?"

"If you remain in port until to-morrow you will have to explain, so my advice to you, Captain Urbana, is to put to sea at once, crippled though you are, seek some friendly port in which to repair damages, and then come out boldly under the Black Flag."

"So I say, and you will enrich yourself Urbana, as well as us," said Senor Valverde.

"It is the advice I should expect from you, Valverde, being, as you are, the secret chief of a band of highwaymen, but I hardly looked for such a recommendation from Banker Escalon," rejoined Captain Almo Urbana with a sneer.

"Why not, for as the receiver of my plunder he is as guilty as the robber, and when you turn pirate he will sell your booty for you, Urbana, and we will all be in the same boat together."

"Yes, Banker Escalon and yourself living here in safety, and as honored citizens, while I, with the hangman's noose about my neck will be sailing the seas to add to your riches."

"But I shall accept your advice, seniors, knowing that if I remain I will be relieved of my command and am ashore, destitute and friendless."

"I shall sail to-night, hoist the Black Flag as soon as I have gotten my vessel in trim, for it chimes in with my humor so to do."

"You are wise," said Escalon, and then followed a long conversation between the three in regard to the sending in of the booty taken and the disposal of it by Banker Escalon and division of the gold received.

It was after midnight when the Mexican officer left the banker's home and wended his way quickly to the shore where a harbor boat placed him on board his vessel.

As the lights faded out astern, Almo Urbana shook his clinched fist toward the town and hissed forth:

"Yes, I will raise the black flag, Senors Escalon and Valverde, but not one *peso* shall you share of my blood-stained gold, for this vessel is *mine* now, and I will carry out my own plans as I please."

"Yes, I shall hunt down that American officer, and then Rachel Ravera shall become my bride."

"Hal hal hal seniors, Almo, the Buccaneer is his own master from this night!"

CHAPTER IV.

A PIRATE AND HIS PRIZE.

In one of the numerous bayous, which form a perfect network upon the Gulf shores of Louisiana, a vessel lay at anchor, almost completely hidden by the trees that overhung the sluggish stream where she had sought refuge.

It was not from a storm blowing fiercely in the Gulf without that the vessel had sought a haven there, for the sea was ruffled only by a six-knot breeze and the sun shone brightly from a cloudless sky.

But the look of the vessel was that which would have caused the skipper of an honest craft to turn from her.

She was of beautiful model, graceful as a swan and carried a lateen rig, well known in the West Indian waters and Caribbean Sea, but seldom seen in those days above the southern latitudes.

The craft was of some three hundred tons burden, and had the appearance of having been

fitted out for pleasure rather than hard service, and yet upon her decks was a battery of guns of heavy caliber and a crew of some ninety men.

A wild, reckless-looking set of men they were, their dark faces indicating their far southern origin, as well as their speech.

They were dressed in red and white striped shirts, black skull-caps and trousers of the same hue, and all had the look of men who lived desperate lives.

The craft was the *Sea Arrow*, a vessel under the command of Lamonte, the Red Rover of the Lagoons, a man who had spread terror along the whole Gulf Coast.

She was in hiding there in the bayou, awaiting the return of her captain, who, with half a dozen men, had captured a fishing-smack and had gone up to New Orleans to cut out a vessel formerly owned by the pirate chief and captured from him by Captain Cecil Dare, a young officer, sent out by the United States Government especially on a pirate-hunting cruise.

Upon the quarter-deck of the *goleta*, which had been built by Don Ramon Ravera, a millionaire Mexican, for his yacht, and hence its extreme beauty, was a young officer pacing to and fro with the measured tread of one who had been reared a sailor.

He was a blonde, with blue eyes and golden hair, the latter falling in curls upon his broad shoulders, and in striking contrast to the black locks of the crew.

His face was bronzed by exposure only, but otherwise would have been as fair as a girl's, and beardless, he really appeared like a handsome woman in male attire.

His costume was rich and elegant, a uniform lavishly embroidered in gold, and his white sombrero was set jauntily upon the side of his head.

Upon his small hands he wore half a dozen rings set with exquisite gems, while in his ruffled shirt front also glittered a diamond of rare size and luster.

Presently a boat shot around a curve of the bayou, and in it were two men, one at the oars, the other serving as coxswain.

"Boat ahoy!" mechanically called out an officer forward, and the answer was returned:

"*Sea Arrow*."

"Ay, ay, come alongside," and the boat, which had kept steadily on, ran alongside, while the coxswain sprang on deck, and approaching the quarter-deck, saluted the officer whom I have described.

"Well, is the *goleta* in sight, Sanchez?"

"Yes, senior, a league down the coast and, with the signal flying."

"Ay, ay, go and pilot her in; but you are sure it is the captain's old craft?"

"Yes, sir, I know her well."

The coxswain at once returned to his boat, and was soon out of sight upon his return down the bayou, while Senor Ravel mused aloud:

"So he has gotten possession of his *goleta* again; but I wonder if he thinks I am such a fool as to believe that he wanted her simply for an extra vessel?"

"Oh, no, I am well aware of the secret treasure-box on board, and that he wants the old *goleta* to get his riches, not caring a *peso* for her as a vessel, now that he has this one," and Lieutenant Ravel again paced the deck until an hour after, the sharp bows of a vessel, similar in build and rig to the *Sea Arrow*, came into view around the bend in the bayou.

The craft was weather-worn in appearance, and bore numerous scars of combats in hull and rigging, while, upon her armed deck hardly over half a dozen men were visible.

She was urged by her sweeps, and gliding near the *Sea Arrow* dropped anchor, while a cheer broke from the pirate crew at her having been successfully cut out of port by their daring captain.

That personage stood upon the quarter deck of the prize and hailing the *Sea Arrow* bade Lieutenant Ravel come on board.

As he stood on the deck of the *goleta* awaiting the approach of his lieutenant he looked little like a man whose name was a terror along the Gulf coast from Key West to Yucatan.

He was dressed in a blue uniform and might readily be taken for an American naval officer. He was a young man, with a dark, decided face, marred by dissipation and a reckless nature, as could be seen when one took a close look at him.

But he looked like one to command, to do a daring deed and who would lead men, not follow.

That he was an American his appearance showed, though he had called out to Senor Ravel in perfect Spanish.

"Well, Senor Ravel, I have my vessel, you see?" he said in quick, well-toned voice as the officer stepped on deck.

"I expected that you would, Captain Lamonte," was the complimentary reply, and the officer added:

"You do not seem to have lost a single man, senior."

"No, for not a shot had to be fired; but come into the cabin with me," and he led the way into the rather large and comfortable cabin of the *goleta*.

When the two were seated, with a decanter of

brandy and cigars on the table between them, the chief said:

"I expected to have to cut out the *goleta*, but tried a different plan, and it was successful. I went to the Hotel St. Luis upon my arrival at New Orleans, claimed to be a coast planter in search of a yacht, and went to see Newman & Company, in whose hands Captain Cecil Dare had left the prize to be sold."

"He told me of the *goleta*, but I pretended that I wouldn't have a yacht with such a record, and while looking at other craft saw this one."

"He did not speak of her then as the pirate prize, but took me on board; and when I said I would buy her he made known what she was."

"But I sunk prejudice and gave him a check for the amount in full, asking him if he would on the morrow put her in perfect repair for me, which he promised to do."

"Then I begged to take the crew of the smack and give her a trial, as the wind was fresh, and of course I ran her on down the river and thus got possession of her."

"But you had to buy her."

"So the crew and the band at our retreat must think, Ravel, for they all subscribed for that purpose; but to you I will say that the check was given after banking-hours, and was utterly worthless, as Mr. Newman discovered when he presented it for payment," and the pirate chief laughed heartily at the fraud he had perpetrated to get possession of his vessel, and in the laugh Ravel joined him, though had Lamonte analyzed the merriment of his lieutenant he would have found it was forced.

CHAPTER V.

THE SECRET TREASURE.

"Now, Senor Ravel," said Captain Lamonte, after laughing over his cheating the shipping agent of New Orleans out of his vessel so cleverly, "I have a secret to tell you."

"I shall receive it in full confidence, Captain Lamonte."

"Oh, yes, I have perfect confidence in you, Ravel, and know you to be a brave man and a splendid officer."

"You have, I know, been my rival in the affections of our late chief's daughter, the lovely Felice, who is my betrothed wife, but then I forgive you for that, as she is one to win any man's heart."

At the mention of the name of Felice, Ravel's face flushed and then paled, but he said quietly:

"I knew, Senor Captain, that when Chief Chevallo died he left you his heir, to his ship and treasure, as well as wished his daughter to become your wife."

"I, with others, have always regarded our chief's daughter, our beautiful Rover Queen, most fondly, but you are our captain and I yield to you in all things, well knowing also that the Senorita Felice loves you devotedly."

"Well spoken, Ravel, and I appreciate your words, and will prove my friendship for you by my perfect trust in you."

"But now to this secret."

"Yes, senior."

"You know when I kidnapped that lovely Mexican heiress, Don Ramon Ravera's daughter, I expected to receive from her father an enormous ransom?"

"Yes, senior."

"But the coming of her father in his yacht and giving chase, and the attack by that American officer, Cecil Dare, in his boats, rescued the girl from me."

"I remember, senior."

"He got my vessel, but I captured the yacht of the Don, and managed to escape."

"It was a brave escape, too, sir, for you had lost all," said Ravel, in flattering tones; but then he seemed to know that his chief loved flattery.

"I got the yacht, and there she lies, Ravel, armed, equipped, and one of the finest vessels afloat, so that she is better than the craft which the American took from me."

"But now to my secret, for it is of this vessel."

"You intend to fit her out, sir, and have two cruisers?"

"No, Ravel, I have another plan in view, and you are to carry it out for me."

"I am ready to obey all orders, chief."

"You, and all of the band, knew that I had some deep motive for getting this *goleta* again into my possession."

"I had such reason and it is just this—she carries a treasure."

"A treasure, senior?" asked Ravel with well-feigned surprise.

"Yes, when this *goleta* was built, Chief Chevallo drew the plans, and in it he had placed a secret trap, or closet, which I defy any man to find unaided."

"The secret of this trap is known but to me and Chevallo's daughter, Queen Felice, and of course when the vessel was lost we knew the treasure went with her."

"When I went on board the vessel with the agent, I discovered that the secret had not been found out by the American captors, so I was glad indeed to get possession of her again."

"And there is much booty in this secret trap, senior?"

"Yes, all of old Chevallo's jewels, considerable silver plate and bags of gold, with my own riches accumulated since I became the captain of the Rovers of the Lagoons."

"It must be a large sum in value then, chief."

"Yes, over sixty thousand pesos, and it is all here now."

"But I see no reason why this sum should be divided with the band, and I have decided upon a plot to save it to three of us."

"Yes, señor."

"I wish you to take command of this vessel and run her to a certain island of the Bahamas, which I will give you the chart of."

"You know that I am to marry Chevallo's daughter, and when I have done so I will come to the island in a coasting craft with only a couple of men take the treasure on the *goleta* except your share, and leave you the command of the band, when you can return in the *goleta* and become chief, no one knowing that I got the treasure, but believing the story which you must tell of how the American discovered the secret."

"I understand, Señor Captain."

"Now, Ravel, you understand my wishes, and the trust I place in you."

"Yes, Captain Lamonte, perfectly."

"And you accept the trust?"

"With thanks for your confidence, señor."

"Then here is the chart of the island in the Bahamas, and you can run there after we have parted company."

"We will sail together, then, señor?"

"Yes, and the two vessels are to keep together for a couple of days, and then you are purposely to lose us in the night, or in a storm, if we have one."

"Make your way then to the Bahama isle, and await my coming."

"I understand, señor."

"I will sail for the retreat, report your vessel as lost at sea, or captured, and then carry out a plan I have to kidnap the Senorita Ravera, and secure the enormous ransom I know her father will gladly pay me for her restoration."

"Then I shall wed Senorita Felice, and sail in a smack with her mother, herself and a couple of trusted men, pretending to go on a secret run to New Orleans; but I shall head for the Bahamas, take our share of the treasure on board this vessel, and then you are to return to the retreat and assume command of the Lagoon Rovers, letting it be supposed that I was lost at sea, for you will never hear of Lamonte again, Señor Ravel."

"Well, señor, with such a bride as the Senorita Felice, I do not wonder that you should leave the sea and give up piracy, especially as you take your neck out of the yard-arm noose by so doing, and will have a large fortune as well."

The chief glanced quickly at his officer, for it seemed to him that there was a tone of sarcasm in the words and manner of Ravel; but the innocent look he met convinced him that he was mistaken, and after some further instructions to his lieutenant, he returned on board the Sea Arrow, and the two vessels set sail, going out of the bayou under sweeps, and then heading out into the Gulf.

The second night after sailing a heavy gale set in, and when the dawn came the prize was nowhere in sight, so the pirate chief held on alone to his stronghold among the Mexican lagoons.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOY WANDERER.

UPON the piazza of a neat little cottage, nestling among a bower of roses, and standing upon the shore of a haven in New England, sat two persons one pleasant Sabbath afternoon, enjoying the balmy breezes that came in from the Atlantic.

It was a pretty picture, and the air was perfumed with the scent of a hundred flowers, for the spring had come and all nature was smiling after a long and severe winter.

The birds sung merrily in the trees, the roar of the surf on the beach without the harbor, half a mile away, came to the ears of the two upon the piazza, and the deep-toned bell of a church in the little town sent its resonant sound across the bay to break in many an echo against the rocks upon the other shore.

One of the two upon the piazza was a woman of forty-five, with a face in which were the traces of former beauty, though her hair had whitened, and a look of resigned sadness rested upon every feature.

She was dressed in deep black, and held in her hand a paper which she had been reading when joined by a young girl of twenty, who had come from the village, where she had a class in Sunday-school.

"Ah, mother, you have been weeping again, as you always do when I leave you," said the young girl, affectionately kissing her mother, and then seating herself by her side.

"Yes, Mirian, I feel strangely sad this bright Sabbath day, for my thoughts will revert to the bitter past."

"Do not speak of it, mother, for all is in the past now, and we will live for the future," said the maiden, cheerfully.

"But I must think of it, my child."

"I reproach myself for having married that wicked man, Lester Lamond—Heaven forgive me for speaking thus of the dead! but I was left, as I believed, destitute by your father when he died, and with you, your sister and brother depending upon me for food, clothing and education."

"So it was that I married him, and then our lives became a torment, for his son Montague forced your sister to run away and marry, and he drove my poor little boy, a mere child, a wanderer upon the earth, and you two left to earn your living by teaching."

"Yes, mother, but sister married well, if it was a runaway match, and I have a good place now as teacher, which supports us both comfortably, and Mr. Lamond is dead, while his son was forced to go to sea and has gone to the bad."

"As for Mark, I am sure he will turn up some day, and give us every reason to feel proud of him."

"Ah, no, Mirian, I fear that little Mark is dead, though every day I search the papers hoping to see some notice of the wandering boy."

"He'll turn up, mother, I am sure, when we least expect."

"But will he be able to find us, do you think?"

"You left a letter with the postmaster for him, you remember, mother, in case he went to our old home to look us up."

"So I did, Mirian, and your hope revives mine of some day seeing my little boy again—you are so hopeful and cheery, my child."

The young girl turned her head quickly aside to hide a tear, for she had, in her own heart, ceased to hope for the return of the little boy who had, years before been forced to run away to sea on account of the cruel treatment at the hands of a step-father.

As she turned her head, that her mother might not see her tears, her eyes fell upon a trim-looking schooner running into the harbor under a cloud of canvas, having just rounded a lofty headland as she came down the coast.

"Mother, there comes the weekly packet-schooner from Boston and she is ahead of time."

"Yes, Mirian, for she is not due until tomorrow morning, but she has had a fair wind, I suppose, all the way," and both mother and daughter gazed with interest upon the little vessel, which ran rapidly up the harbor to an anchorage.

For half-an-hour there they sat upon the piazza talking together and enjoying the pleasant afternoon, and then Mirian said quickly:

"See, mother, there comes an officer to our cottage."

The eyes of Mrs. Lamond fell upon a slender form, clad in uniform, and coming at a quick, firm tread up the gravel walk leading from the highway to the cottage.

Another moment and the stranger halted at the steps, doffed his cap, and, with a low bow, asked:

"May I inquire if this is the home of Mrs. Lamond, who was once known as the Widow Cloverfield?"

"I am Mrs. Lamond, sir, and—"

"Permit me to introduce myself as Midshipman Mark Cloverfield, your—"

But the sentence was unfinished by the cry:

"Mother, it is Mark!"

With a bound the midshipman, a youth of seventeen, was up the steps and his arms about his mother, that loving woman whom he had left eight years before when he was a lad of nine.

"My boy! my noble boy!" cried Mrs. Lamond, her heart overflowing with joy at the return of the brave little lad who had been driven from his home by the cruelties of his step-father.

And Mirian wept tears of joy at the wanderer's return, and brought him an easy-chair out upon the piazza and said:

"Now sit right there, Mark, and tell us all about yourself."

"We were speaking of you only a little while ago, and mother feared you were dead, but I bade her hope for the best."

"And here I am, Mirian, having arrived not an hour ago upon the Boston packet, which I brought into port, as the night we left we were struck by a hurricane which washed the first mate overboard and crippled the captain."

"They all say that I saved the schooner, and the captain says that the owners will present me with a gold medal; but I took command at the skipper's request, and we made the quickest run ever known from Boston, they tell me."

"Ah, my son, you are no longer my little Mark, but a brave, splendid man, though a mere boy in years."

"But Mirian asked how you found us?"

"Oh, yes, I went to the old home, and as no one knew where you had gone, I made inquiries of the postmaster and received the letter you left for me two years ago."

"Then I asked upon landing here, and was told that a pretty little cottage, in a nest of roses here upon the hill was your home, so I made all

sail for home, and here I am as happy as a far ashore," and the lad laughed joyously while he looked the very picture of happiness.

CHAPTER VII.

A YOUTHFUL PIRATE.

ALL anxiety to know how it was that little Mark of nine years, who had run away to sea, returned at seventeen a handsome youth wearing the uniform of a midshipman in the United States Navy, both Mrs. Lamond and Mirian pressed him to tell them the story.

"First tell me where Sister Nell is?" he said.

"She married Clayton Clark, and is living in Boston, where her husband is doing well?"

"Have I arrived at the dignity of an uncle yet, mother?" slyly asked the youth.

"Yes; Nellie has two lovely children, a little boy named after you, and a baby girl who bears Mirian's name."

"Good! that boy must be a sailor, for there is no other life to lead."

"Now look at me, mother; when I left you I was but a mere child, and I got a berth as cabin-boy."

"Then I became powder-monkey on a man-of-war and we were wrecked on the Mexican Coast and I shipped before the mast on a merchant craft and got captured by a pirate."

"A pirate?" cried the mother and sister in a breath.

"Yes, mother, I have seen a great deal of piracy I may say, as your son had to turn pirate himself to save his life."

"Oh Mark!"

"My poor boy!"

"Oh, don't mind it, I beg of you, for I did not become one of those red-handed monsters you read so much about in the papers."

"I simply was taken into the special service of Lamonte, the Rover of the Lagoons, as he was called."

"He had a den, or rather stronghold, on the Gulf coast and defied all cruisers sent out to capture him."

"It seems that he had become lieutenant on the outlaw craft of Chevallo a famous Gulf buccaneer, whose life he had saved, and when the chief died he left Lamonte his heir, made him leader of the Lagoon Pirates, captain of his *goleta* and wished him to marry his daughter."

"A pirate's daughter, Mark?"

"Yes, Mirian, and a beautiful girl, true as steel and to whom I owe my life."

"God bless her," said Mrs. Lamond fervently.

"Though a pirate's daughter she was a noble girl, mother."

"Her mother had loved Chevallo and married him, clinging to him through his life of outlawry, and Felice, their daughter had been born at sea."

"She had been sent to New Orleans to boarding-school and that saved her, for she knew how evil was the life her father led."

"I was taken to the retreat by Lamonte, and both Madam Chevallo and Felice were most kind to me."

"Lamonte was suspicious and in some way discovered that I was urging the mother and daughter to give up their wild life and seek a home elsewhere, and one day he shot me."

"I fell back into the lake from the bluff, and he supposed I was dead; but I got ashore and Felice helped me, dressed my wound, kept me in hiding and aided my escape in an open boat."

"I made my way northward, and one night swam off to a cruiser, the brig-of-war Vulture, commanded by Captain Brainard, a noble man, while she was anchored off Charleston."

"I was given the berth of cabin-boy, and in an action, the captain deemed that I had done something worthy of promotion, and he made me a midshipman; but I had been such an imp of mischief before, playing all kinds of tricks, even upon the officers, with the aid of a pet bear, a monkey and a parrot, that I was most cordially hated by all on board."

"Ah Mark! you are just the same naughty boy," said Mrs. Lamond, reprovingly.

"Yes, Mark, you made the life of Mr. Lamond wretched with your pranks," added Mirian.

"Well, that was in revenge for the way he treated mother and her children."

"But I have reformed now and am as dignified as an admiral."

"But the men liked me, though the middies annoyed me for having won my berth on board, and they set upon me, the lieutenants and all, as soon as Captain Brainard died."

"I defended myself, so was ordered in irons and to be catted."

"What is that, Mark?"

"To be whipped with the cat-o'-nine-tails."

"But I saw that the shore was not far off, so I ran up the rigging, out on the yard, and jumped overboard."

"I reached the shore, found some Mexican fishermen there, and, speaking Spanish well, joined them and went to Vera Cruz."

"My poor boy, what have you not passed through?" and Mrs. Lamond's eyes dimmed with tears.

"It has helped me, mother, for the experience I can never forget, and I am as hardy as a pine."

knot now, and flatter myself that I know something of the world," and Mark spoke with pardonable pride.

"In Vera Cruz I could only get a berth ashore as a messenger in a Monte Casino, and one night an American officer came there to play—"

"To play, Mark?"

"Yes, mother, for it was a gambling den, and—"

"But, Mark, I fear—"

"Mother, I never played a game of cards in my life, so don't worry about me."

"I had to get work and that paid best, while I knew I would see men there who might help me to something better, as I did."

"I found there was a plot against this officer, and as a quarrel was put upon him a duel followed, so I determined to save him."

"His vessel lay off-shore, and I went aboard and told the officer that the captain had sent for four men."

"I took them to the scene of the duel, arriving just in time, about sunrise, for after he had disarmed a Mexican officer, a Captain Almo Urbana, his Mexican second and the two others set upon him to kill him."

"He gave the Mexican captain a slash down the cheek, which marred his beauty and marked him for life; but he would have been slain by the treacherous scamps if I had not arrived with the four American seamen."

"Of course we won, for the Mexicans went back to Vera Cruz glad to escape, while Captain Cecil Dare, for such was his name, took me with him when he sailed the next day from Vera Cruz."

"He appreciated your services, my son."

"Yes, mother, and made me his clerk, giving me a place in the cabin with him."

"I told him all about my life, and was glad to join him in his cruise after pirates, for he was sent out in the special service of hunting down sea outlaws."

"He had rescued the daughter of a millionaire Don from Lamonte the Rover of the Lagoons, but while he captured the pirate craft, Lamonte escaped, seized the Don's yacht and escaped in her."

"I told the captain that Lamonte's *goleta* had a secret closet on board, where all his treasure was, and we sailed to New Orleans where the vessel had been sent as a prize; but she had been run off the night before our arrival by Lamonte, who had gone there in his new cruiser, the Don's yacht."

"We gave chase and captured Lamonte's craft, after a hot action, but the treasure craft escaped us, and as Captain Cecil Dare was anxious to restore to Don Ramon his beautiful vessel, a prize crew was put on board the Sea Arrow and both vessels sailed for Hacienda Harbor, where the Mexican millionaire had his home."

"My son, what a life has been yours," said Mrs. Lamond in strange wonder at the adventures of her boy wanderer.

CHAPTER VIII.

MIDSHIPMAN CLOVERFIELD.

THE young midshipman paused, as though memories of the past came vividly before him, summoned up by his mother's words, and then he said slowly:

"Yes, mother, my life has been a strange one indeed, and it is not yet one-fourth lived, for I am a boy in years, as you said, though a man in experience."

"What the future holds for me I do not know; but I have determined to win fame and fortune, mother, and as a stepping-stone I hold the rank of a midshipman in the United States Navy."

"Could a boy not yet eighteen ask more?"

Both the mother and sister thought not, and so said, and Mark Cloverfield resumed his story.

"When Captain Cecil rescued the Senorita Rachel Ravera, the Don's daughter, he was severely wounded, having received three wounds."

"He was taken to the Don's grand home on the coast and tenderly cared for until his recovery, but he lost his heart to the beautiful Senorita Rachel and she loved him also, so they became engaged."

"When he visited Vera Cruz it was known to Captain Urbana, the Mexican officer, who had had hopes of winning the Don's daughter himself, that the American was his successful rival and so he decided to put him out of the way, in which I thwarted him."

"Then Captain Urbana was given command of a Mexican brig-of-war, to go upon a pirate-hunting cruise, and he sailed first for Hacienda Harbor where he told his story of Captain Dare's visit to Vera Cruz, and it was believed by the Don, and caused Senorita Ravera deep sorrow, though she still held hope in her lover."

"The Mexican hinted that Captain Dare was a pirate, and so he decided to capture him, and thus save Senorita Rachel from the sad fate of becoming a pirate's bride."

"Although he knew that the Sea Soldier was a legitimate American cruiser, he laid wait for us and boldly attacked us."

"His was a brig-of-war, larger, heavier, hav-

ing more guns and a fourth more in crew than the Sea Soldier; but Captain Dare handled his schooner so splendidly that in full view of the Don's home he forced the Mexican to run up the white flag and send a boat aboard stating that he had made the mistake of believing us to be a pirate."

"Captain Dare demanded that he hoist the Stars and Stripes and salute us as we sailed by, which he sullenly did, and while we sailed into Hacienda Harbor, where our prize, the pirate *goleta*, had arrived before us, Captain Urbana stood off to sea knowing that his falsehood about Cecil Dare would soon be known."

"Had Captain Dare known at the time of the action that the Mexican had not really made a mistake, and all that he had said against him, in fact known who he was, he would have taken his brig then and there."

"Well, mother and sister, my yarn is getting to be a long one, so I must hasten to the end of it."

"We are most deeply interested, my son."

"Yes, Mark, we wish to hear all that you have gone through," added Mirian.

"It is pleasant to have two such good listeners, I assure you," said Mark with a laugh, and then he resumed:

"When I saw the Senorita Rachel I did not wonder at Captain Dare's falling in love with her, for she was the most beautiful woman I ever saw, except you, mother, when you were a young girl, as that miniature shows you to have been, and I think Mirian looks much as you did then."

"Oh, Mark, have you been to Ireland in your wanderings and kissed the Blarney Stone?" cried Mirian blushing at the compliment as did her mother also.

"No indeed, it's a fact, I pledge you, and I may make another exception in Felice, the daughter of Chevallo the Buccaneer, for she is indeed beautiful."

"But let me go on with my story, after telling you that you should never doubt a sailor's yarn."

"After a few days passed at Hacienda Harbor for repairs, we turned the yacht over to the Don again, as it belonged to him, and set sail with our prisoners for New Orleans, where Captain Dare found orders to come North."

"I had made a pledge to Felice, when she aided my escape, not to pilot any armed force against the Lagoon stronghold for a given time, and though urged to do so I kept my promise, and Captain Dare respected me for it."

"But when the time expired I did pilot the Sea Soldier there, but found that the Lagoon Buccaneers had all fled."

"And Felice?"

"I do not know what became of her, Mirian, and only hope that her fate was not the sad one I fear it was."

"And what do you fear her fate was, Mark?" asked Mirian.

"I'll tell you, although I meant to skip that part of the story."

"You see, when I was captured by Lamonte I recognized him."

"Who was he, Mark?"

"Don't worry, mother, for I heard you tell him one day, when he made you very angry, that he would end his life on the gallows, and I guess he will."

"Ah! can it have been Montague Lamond, my husband's son?"

"That was the man, mother; but as I had grown to be quite a youth, and spoke Spanish altogether, he did not know me."

"He was your step-son, Lamonte was, and when Captain Dare captured him he also knew him, for, mother, did you ever know that Mr. Lamond, before marrying you, had been twice married?"

"Yes, my son, but I never knew it until after his death, when I discovered the fact among his papers."

"Well, mother, he was married, and more, he treated his young wife so shamefully that she died of a broken heart, and drove their only child, a son, out into the world."

"That boy is now Captain Cecil Dare, Lamonte's half-brother, and now you see that the one who had suffered so could have been avenged upon the one who had so cruelly treated him; but instead, he allowed me to aid Lamonte to escape, and I set him free; but I made him give up some of his ill-gotten wealth, and I have it all for you, mother, and my sisters."

"And mother, Lamonte may have returned to his stronghold, and taken Felice away with him, though I hope not."

"As for Captain Dare, he ran on to Washington with his schooner, and kept his word to me, for the President gave me a midshipman's warrant, and I am ordered to return to the schooner and serve under my gallant captain, who is again to be sent pirate-hunting."

"But before he sails south he will come by here for me, and he is to be your son, too, and a noble one he'll make you, mother, only Mirian must not fall in love with him, as it would break Senorita Ravera's heart to lose him."

"Now, mother, you know how it is that your boy happens to be Midshipman Cloverfield."

CHAPTER IX.

HO FOR THE GULF!

IT was a strange coincidence that the career of three young men should have been united after years of vicissitude and danger, as had been the lives of Captain Cecil Dare, Montague Lamond, known as Lamonte the Rover of the Lagoons and Mark Cloverfield.

The first named had never known love for a father who had by his acts toward his mother and himself taught him almost to hate him, who had driven him out alone in the world after that mother's death to fight the battle of life for himself.

Taking the maiden name of his mother, Dare, the boy had fought the battle of life unaided, and won fame and fortune, for at the age of twenty-seven he was a captain in the navy of the United States, and sent on a special mission by his Government.

Montague Lamond, his younger half-brother, who had made his life so wretched at home, had been wild, reckless and so lost to honor that he had not only gone to the bad before he was out of his teens, but with the brand of a murderer upon his brow had been forced to fly from justice and in the end drift into piracy, until at last he became a terror upon the seas as Lamonte, the Red Rover of the Lagoons.

The third one, Mark Cloverfield, has told his story to the reader, who now knows that the three met in the Gulf of Mexico, two of them leading an honorable career, and the third owed his escape from the yard-arm to the very two whom he had persecuted so bitterly in the past.

Upon the deck of a large and graceful schooner, bowling merrily along under a fair breeze, stood two officers some six weeks after the arrival home of Midshipman Mark Cloverfield.

The vessel was a schooner-of-war, carrying a heavy battery of three eighteens to a broadside and three thirty-twos mounted on pivots forward, amidships and aft, so that she could fire a broadside of six pieces.

Her crew numbered fully a hundred men, all told, and her appearance was that of a stanch, fleet craft, either new or just out of the yard where she had been refitted wholly.

The bows were very sharp, the stern rather narrow, with good beam amidships, while her masts and spars were remarkably long, giving her vast sail-carrying capacity.

That a thorough sailor commanded her was evident at a glance, for all about her showed as much.

That commander now stood upon the quarter-deck, idly leaning over the taffrail and conversing with a youth dressed in the uniform of a midshipman.

Captain Cecil Dare was no ordinary man.

His life since a lad had been passed upon the sea, and yet he was a man of the courtly manners of a cavalier, handsome as an Apollo and every inch a sailor.

The midshipman standing near him was Mark Cloverfield, who in his cabin-boy and before-the-mast days had been simply known as "Clover."

"Well, Mark, the improvements I had made in the bow and rig of the schooner have aided her immensely," said Captain Dare, glancing at his beautiful vessel as she fairly flew over the waves under a ten-knot breeze.

"She is greatly improved, sir, for she stands up better under increased sail, and the sharpening of her bows and making them higher help her greatly, while she carries a fourth more canvas than she did."

"Yes, and exchanging my broadside twelve-pounders for eighteens gives me a far heavier and better battery, as some of our outlaw cruisers will find out when we reach the Gulf."

"Yes, sir, and it will not be well for Captain Almo Urbana to make another mistake in firing on you for a pirate."

"No; but you just called him Almo."

"Yes, sir, that is his first name."

"If I have heard it, I had forgotten it; but do you know that there is a new pirate of that name now playing havoc in the Gulf?"

"No, sir; but it may be Captain Almo Urbana turned pirate."

"Perhaps; but he was a captain in the Mexican Navy."

"True, sir, but he was in trouble, as I happen to know, and after his firing upon you Don Ramon Ravera may have made it so warm with his Government that he was forced to turn outlaw."

"Well, if so, I can now have a chance to take him for a pirate, Mark."

"Yes, sir; but you told me the other day that you feared Lamonte had again raised the black flag."

"Yes, for though my crew believed that he had jumped overboard from the open port, with his irons, and thus taken his own life, we know that he escaped; but did he give you any idea of what his future career would be?"

"He said he would go back to the stronghold and wed Felice, but I hinted that the place was to be raided at once by you, and yet, as we found it vacated, he may have gotten there and given the warning."

"Yet he had no vessel?"

"No, sir, unless the Treasure *goleta* went there, and, put in repair, she is a dangerous craft."

"She is indeed, for she was fleet as a bird even in the wretched condition in which she was when I captured her."

"Yes, I guess that Lamonte is again at his lawless deeds, and though it would cut me to the heart, if I capture him again I shall have to obey my orders, which are to hang all pirate captains and their officers without trial."

"I only hope that if Almo the Pirate is Captain Urbana, and Lamonte is our unfortunate brother, sir, that they will not make a raid upon the Ravera Hacienda."

Captain Dare started, and he said quickly:

"I had not thought of that, Mark, and I thank you for the suggestion."

"I will run at once for the Hacienda Harbor, and see if they have been there, for those two men would be guilty of any crime."

"I fear so, sir."

After a moment Captain Dare said:

"Well, Mark, I must again tell you how much I enjoyed my visit to your home, and how happy I am in having found a good mother and sisters there, for I no longer feel a friendless wanderer with such a home to go to when on leave."

"And they feel toward you, sir, in the same way; but is not that the flash of a sail on the horizon, just off the starboard bow?"

As Mark asked the question, from the lookout aloft came the cry:

"Sail ho!"

CHAPTER X.

THE DAUGHTER OF A BUCCANEER.

IN the midst of a net-work of lagoons, on the Mexican Coast, through which only a skillful pilot could take even a small boat, was a lake of considerable size.

On the sea side were the low-lying shores of the lagoons, in which no opening was visible until one was within a few feet of it, and even here the waters were very deep and risky in their dark hues.

The lake seemed almost bottomless and was long enough to float a navy of the largest ships.

The land side of the lake rose bold and precipitous to a height of forty feet, jutting boldly out into the deep waters, and with lagoons on either side, extending into the interior for several miles, almost making an island of the ridge, the summit of which was clad with massive trees.

Upon this ridge, in a vale, were the huts of the outlawed people known as the Lagoon Buccaneers.

In these cabins dwelt men, women and children, who led the lives of outlaws, lived upon robbing their fellow-men and took life to rob and gain booty and food.

They were a motley crew, of a dozen nationalities, desperate, reckless and brave when courage was needed in their evil career.

There were men there rigged out in picturesque and rich costumes, women and children wearing velvets, silks and laces, and all more or less decked out in jewelry, the getting of which had caused blood-letting.

In front of the cabins, which fronted upon the lagoon on the left of the ridge, lay a dozen vessels at anchor, from a small merchant brig to a fishing smack, while the shore was covered with small boats, fishing nets, and a rudely constructed ways for hauling a craft out for repairs.

Upon the ridge overlooking the lake stood a cabin larger and more comfortable than those in the pirate village.

It had a shed across the front to serve as a piazza, and glass windows taken from the stern ports of some large vessel for light and air.

The doors had also been taken from a vessel, and the cabin, which had four rooms in it, was wholly furnished with ships' furniture.

There were flower-beds near, and rustic seats, an arbor, a couple of hammocks and much more to indicate that the dwellers in the cabin made themselves as comfortable as circumstances would admit.

Upon the summit of the ridge back some hundreds of yards, was another cabin, the door of which was closed, and before the door of a hut near it were seated two blacks, the one a negro, the other a negress, and their appearance indicated that they had not been many years away from their native land of Africa.

The hour was afternoon, and both were nodding lazily as they sat there in the shade, while in hammocks, swung near the large cabin on the cliff were two others enjoying their *siesta*.

One of these arose from the hammock impatiently and said:

"It is no use to try for I cannot sleep."

Then the occupant of the other hammock arose and coming toward the first speaker said:

"Nor can I, for I feel as though trouble was before us, Felice."

The last speaker was a woman of forty, dignified, dressed plainly in black, wearing no jewelry except a gold band encircling her wedding finger, and with a form that was still graceful,

a face that was yet most lovely, though there rested upon it a look of sadness which seemed to have been indelibly stamped there.

As she spoke she sat down upon the rustic seat in the little arbor and glanced somewhat anxiously toward her companion who was a young and very beautiful girl.

In strange contrast to the other, the maiden was dressed in the picturesque and rich costume of a Mexican lady, and jewels of great value sparkled upon her hands, wrists and neck.

Her form was willowy, graceful, and her face one to see and remember.

"Mother, this life is becoming more and more unbearable every day to me," said the girl petulantly, throwing herself down upon a *serape* near where her mother sat.

"And to me, my child."

"Then we must change it."

"How do you mean?"

"I'll tell you what I mean, mother."

"Yes, Felice."

"I am determined that when Captain Lamonte returns I will tell him to go his way, to remain here if so he will in command of the band, while we, you and I, will go our way."

"If he loves me, he will go with me and make me his wife."

"If he does not he will remain here."

"Ah, Felice, will your eyes never be opened to what this man Lamonte really is?" sadly said the mother.

"He is a pirate, yes, and so was my father."

"Yet how different the men, my child."

"Your father was a noble man, and through the crimes of others driven to despair, which ended in his becoming a pirate after he had been outlawed by his Government."

"I loved him and clung to him through all, and I feel that I so influenced his life that he was a far better man than he otherwise would have been—but see, there is the signal that the *goleta* is returning."

"Yes, and I shall force Lamonte to act one way or the other this very night," was the firm response of the maiden, who was the daughter of Chevallo the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XI.

A MOTHER'S PLEADING.

THE signal which the woman, known as Madam Chevallo, had spoken of, was a red flag run up to the topmost limb of a lightning-blasted tree across the lake and some distance down the lagoons toward the open water of the Gulf.

In this way the coming of the *goleta* was heralded, by the flag being run up as the vessel reached that spot on her way up to the lake, and from where she was seated Madam Chevallo had caught sight of the fluttering piece of red bunting as it unfolded to the breeze in the tree-top.

"My child," said the mother in answer to the determined remark of Felice that she would force Captain Lamonte to terms:

"You must remember also that your father was no pirate at heart, for he never took life ruthlessly, he never robbed women and children, or a poor skipper, and mostly waged his piratical war against our natural enemies the Spaniards."

"He was true to me through all, loved you devotedly and sent us to New Orleans, as you grew in years, where you could gain an education."

"An education for a pirate's daughter?" bitterly said Felice.

"Mother, my sojourn there, my education, my life among honorable people made me feel and know how cruelly wrong was the life my father led."

"I felt that it would be so, my child, yet I was glad, for I hoped that some day it would be you who would turn your father from his evil life."

"But alas! that man Lamonte crossed his path, and saved his life, and that drew him toward him as nothing else could have done."

"He saw in Lamonte what he deemed one such as himself, though a pirate, and he felt that the man had fascinated you."

"Say rather won my love, mother."

"No, for I know you too well to believe that such as Lamonte can win your heart."

"You felt grateful to him for saving your father's life, and as he trusted him you did also."

"As he bade you marry Lamonte, and left you conjointly his heirs, you acquiesced and drifted into the situation without resistance."

"Now you have seen more of Lamonte and know that he is wicked at heart in everything."

"He has put off marrying you, and on several occasions has tested his power with the band against yours, until, finding he was outmatched by you, he has yielded and become revengeful."

"I have watched him carefully, and I have read him heart, body and soul, for I have had experience among just such men as he, a sad experience though it be."

"I am listening with the deepest attention, mother," said the young girl, as Madam Chevallo paused.

But there was a tone of sarcasm in her words, which, however, though observing, her mother took no notice of, but continued:

"Now Lamonte had no right to go and kidnap Don Ravera's beautiful daughter as he did,

and I am so glad that the American officer rescued her."

"He will do the same thing again if opportunity offers, and were you his wife he would cast you off for any fair face that came his way."

"That in his anger he is beyond self-control you saw when he fired upon that brave boy Clover, whom you saved from his fury, for but for you he would have put him to death had he known his shot failed and the youth still lived."

"Now Lamonte is away in search of the Treasure *goleta*, which he placed under the command of Ravel, a man whom I would rather see you wed than the man you believe you love, bad as Ravel really is; but he at least loves you, which I believe Lamonte is incapable of doing."

"But, oh, my poor child, I could be almost a happy woman if you would consent to go far from here with me, seek a home in the United States and live in contentment and honor at least, away from those mad scenes of piracy."

"We have, independent of the treasure on the *goleta*, a really handsome fortune, for our jewels will bring us gold to support us in luxury even."

"True, they were gained by piracy, and were your father's legacy; but we know not whom to restore them to, and we can do good with our gold in atonement, at least as part atonement, for the guilt of gaining them is not at least upon your head or mine."

"Now, what do you say, my child?"

"Shall it be that you will marry this man Lamonte, throw your life away upon a pirate, wreck your fortune and have your end come in gloom and sorrow, or will you cast him off as the serpent that he is, and go with me to where we can dwell in peace and I hope happiness, where some day you can meet one whom you can really love, a man of honor, and be a joy to my latter years."

"Which will you do, Felice, my loved daughter?"

The mother's voice was meek low and pleading as she put the momentous question, and her face was full of anguish as she awaited the response.

At last it came:

"Mother, I love Lamonte, and if he will go with us to another, a different life far from these scenes, I will marry him."

"And if he refuses?"

"Then my love shall turn to venomous hatred," was the almost savage response of the young girl.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TREASURE CRAFT.

HARDLY had the reply of Felice issued from her lips when the long and needle-like bowsprit of a vessel shot out of the wall of foliage across the lake, and the next instant a lateen-rigged vessel came into full view urged forward by her sweeps, two on each side.

"It is the Treasure *goleta*," cried Madam Chevallo as she beheld the craft.

"Yes, mother, it is the captured vessel with our treasure on board, so Lamonte found her quickly and I am sorry I was angry at his trusting her to the command of officer Ravel, who I felt sure would run off with her."

"I had the same dread, my child; but we misjudged him."

"Yes; but where is the Sea Arrow?"

"She will soon be along, I suppose, for Lamonte must have met Ravel before he got very far out to sea, and perhaps may have gone on a short cruise."

"Perhaps so; but I wish he was here, for I am anxious to have this affair settled."

"Yes, there stands Ravel on her decks," and Felice having risen from the *serape*, took a glass from the cabin wall and leveled it at the *goleta*.

"There are but four men on board, I observe," she said after gazing at the vessel a moment through the glass.

"Indeed! what can have become of the others, for Lamonte said that he left an under officer and eight men with Officer Ravel?" and Madam Chevallo gazed earnestly at the vessel.

"I hope there has been no trouble on board, mother."

"I sincerely trust not."

"Lamonte said that he lost sight of the *goleta* in a storm, so that Officer Ravel may have caught it more severely than the Sea Arrow did and lost some of his men."

"Perhaps so; but who did he say was the officer he left under Ravel?"

"The one whom the people call Red Fred, but whom we know as Fred Maddox."

"A wicked-face man, indeed, and the one who gave your father no end of trouble, Felice."

The *goleta* had now come about one-third of the way across the lake, and was about half a mile distant from the bluff.

Her sweeps were working slowly, for they were as much as one man could handle, and her sails were all tightly furled, and her commander seemed not inclined to set any canvas with which to run across the lake to an anchorage under the bluff, the usual riding-ground of the sea cruisers when in the pirate port or haven.

There was a look about the vessel as though she had seen very hard service.

She was of the class known in West Indian waters as a *goleta*, a lateen craft noted for swiftness and staunchness, and very often seen in the early years of the present century, but not frequently in these latter days.

She was of about two hundred tons burden, had a look of speed about her, but moved sluggishly as though her hull was foul and she was deeper in the water than was her wont, from a leak.

Her hull sadly needed paint, and was badly scarred from shot-marks received in combats fought under the sable flag of the pirate.

Her sails were also time-worn and torn, as well as having been frequently patched, as could be seen though they were furled.

Her decks were cut up and splintered, and of her battery of seven guns hardly one seemed to be in good working condition.

One man was at each of the four sweeps, and at the tiller stood the man who had been recognized as Officer Ravel.

It was the same handsome young Mexican into whose keeping Captain Lamonte had entrusted the *goleta*, and the secret of the treasure on board, and ordered to sail for an island among the Bahama group, to await his coming.

Such was the Treasure craft when, instead of going to the Bahamas, she had put into the haven of the Lagoon Buccaneers.

Running up close under the bluff, the helmsman had called to one of the men to ship his heavy oar and come aft to the helm.

Then he stepped to the flag balyards and dipped the black flag that floated there three times, as a salute to the Rover Queen, now standing upon the bluff.

A moment more and the *goleta's* bow swept around, as Officer Ravel again took the helm, and going forward at a run, the man he had relieved stood by the starboard anchor.

"Way 'nough!" called out Officer Ravel, and the three heavy sweeps were raised.

Then came the order:

"Let fall the anchor!"

The man forward obeyed, and with a heavy splash the iron dropped into the lake, the cable running out rapidly, until a score of fathoms had been drawn through the hawse-hole.

As the vessel came to a standstill, Felice said, quickly:

"See, mother, those three seamen at the sweeps are chained to the deck!"

"It is very true, my child, and there has indeed been trouble on board; but here comes Senor Ravel ashore now, and we will soon know all."

As Madam Chevallo spoke, Officer Ravel stepped into the gig towing astern, and seizing the oars, pulled toward the lagoon landing.

CHAPTER XIII.

MUTINEERS.

It will be recalled that the pirate Lamonte, after sailing from the bayou on the Louisiana Coast, where he had run in with the Treasure *goleta* and joined his own vessel, had sailed for his own stronghold among the lagoons of Mexico.

The advice given to his officer, Ravel, to get lost in the night, or, a gale, from the Sea Arrow, and make his way to an island of the Bahamas will also be remembered.

A part of his chief's orders Ravel obeyed, for he did lose sight of the Sea Arrow one night in a storm.

But he did not head for the Bahama Island, as he had decided upon another course.

The truth was that Senor Ravel was ambitious.

He desired both fame and fortune, and also he was anxious to win the love of the beautiful Buccaneer Queen, Felice.

He had nothing against Lamonte, more than that he was between him and the command of the band, and his successful rival for the hand of Queen Felice.

He had served his old chief, Chevallo, well, and had seen a stranger placed over him, yet had not rebelled.

Now he had the chance to strike a death-blow at Lamonte, which would not only put that individual out of the way but elevate him, Ravel.

He had received his orders from his chief, but he had accepted them in silence, giving no promise to obey them.

Ravel was in a peculiar situation.

He loved gold, and here was a treasure in his hands, which he could run off with and live in luxury upon for the remainder of his days.

He wished to make a name as a pirate, that was his greatest ambition, and here was an armed vessel at his command, which when repaired would be a splendid craft for his lawless career.

He loved Felice Chevallo, the daughter of his old chief, and here was an opportunity to utterly crush Lamonte, win the girl and be the leader of the Rovers of the Lagoons.

For a long while he studied over the situations as they presented themselves to his mind, unable at first to decide which he would do.

He had lost sight of the Sea Arrow, so had

the *goleta* for all his own, and in the secret locker was the treasure which Captain Lamonte had decided to take.

At last he decided upon his course—he would go to the stronghold with the *goleta*, report that Lamonte had ordered him to steal it for him, and then see that the band would no longer have such a chief, and that meant that he would step into his captain's shoes, and also wed the fair Felice.

Having decided upon this, he went on deck and ordered the helmsman to steer a course which would bring him to a lagoon near the Rover stronghold.

There was, however, a counterplot going on among the men, while Ravel was plotting his own future career.

The next in command of the *goleta* was a man by the name of Frederick Maddox, but who, on account of his red face, fiery hair and beard, and perhaps his red deeds, had gained his sobriquet among the pirates of "Red Fred."

He was a dangerous man, and greatly feared by all, and yet he was respected for his skill as a seaman and his really true courage.

Now, Red Fred was also ambitious, and he had dreams of future power and wealth.

He also built castles in the air of becoming a successful rival for the hand of Felice.

It is true that he knew that she shunned him, and really seemed to feel a dread and aversion to him.

But Red Fred believed what his mirror told him, that from his own point of observation, he was a very handsome man.

He was prejudiced in his favor in this opinion, yet he did not so consider it, and fascinating to himself he could not understand just why he should not be so to others.

The sycophants cringing about him, from abject fear, he mistook for admiration, while as he always spent his money freely in meeting one of the fair sex he was of course popular with a certain class and never having visited any other he believed that he would be irresistible with all.

Felice had once reproved him for striking a child, and instead of feeling angry toward her he was pleased with her daring.

But from that day when his acts brought him more particularly into her notice, she had despised and dreaded the man.

And this man was the officer under Ravel, with eight seamen as tools to work upon in a plot he had formed.

This plot was to seize the *goleta*, put Ravel to death, take possession of the treasure and sailing for the lagoons await the departure in hiding of the Sea Arrow, when he would go up to the stronghold and declare himself chief of the outlaw band.

Thus it was that he had won the men over to his way of thinking, and the *goleta* was manned only by mutineers.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FIGHT FOR MASTERY.

THERE was one man on board the *goleta* who was not won over by Red Fred the mutineer.

That man was an American, and a quiet fellow whose appearance would never indicate the pirate.

He had been captured upon a merchant brig by Captain Chevallo, and desperately wounded by the pirates' fire he had been taken to the stronghold and most kindly cared for by Felice and her mother.

When he recovered he shipped on board the pirate vessel then under command of Lamonte, for Chevallo had meanwhile died.

He stood at his post always doing his duty as ordered, but no more, and was never known to gamble or carouse.

The men called him "The Chaplain" from his serious looks and good behavior, and yet he had not an enemy in the band.

Red Fred had suggested to the others on the *goleta* to pitch "The Chaplain" overboard, as he knew he would not join him against Ravel.

But the men had begged that Rollo, as he called himself, should at least be asked, and so Red Fred drew him to one side and talked the matter over with him.

Rollo at once acquiesced in the plot, and agreed to join in the attack on Ravel.

But ten minutes after when he went to the wheel he held in his hand a note, and by signs caught Ravel's eye and soon had a chance to slip it into his hand.

Ravel went below and read the note which was as follows:

"Officer Maddox has gotten the men to join him in a mutiny against you, to be carried out to-night when you turn in."

"I pretended to join him also, but remain your friend, and will come to the cabin as soon as you have turned in, so load all your weapons and we will go on deck and make the attack first, for it is our only chance."

"Officer Maddox intends to lie hidden until the Sea Arrow sails, then go in and declare himself chief of the band."

"Give me a sign if you understand fully, but be careful, for I am suspected, I fear, and am watched."

"Leave the gangway door open leading into the cabin, and I will be on hand."

Ravel's face flushed and paled by turns.

He saw how nearly he had been entrapped while plotting mutiny himself.

He read the letter of Rollo carefully over again and then set to work loading the weapons in the cabin.

This done he went on deck, glanced about him and said sternly to Rollo:

"You have not steered close, sir, for the ship is a point off her course."

"Keep awake, or I'll give you a berth at the mast-head until we reach port," and he dealt him what appeared to be a severe blow on the head.

Then he added in a low tone:

"I understand all and will be prepared."

Rollo made no reply, for he knew the angry words of the officer were intended for the ears of Red Fred who was not far away.

When he left off his trick at the wheel, he went forward and grumbled at the abuse put upon him by Ravel, which at once relieved the minds of the others of any fear of his proving a traitor.

Complaining of a pain in the head from the blow given him, he sought his hammock below, and asked to be called when the attack was to be made upon Ravel.

At nine o'clock, or two bells on the first night-watch, he slipped from his hammock, glided aft and found himself in the cabin.

The door was locked behind him and the lamp burned so dimly that at first he did not detect Senor Ravel seated by the companion-way.

"All ready, senor; the attack is to be made at four bells."

"Well, my good fellow, we must fight it out though we are two against nine of them," was the cool response.

"Yes, sir; but it is bright moonlight, and as the wind is fresh two men are at the wheel, and they can be at once gotten rid of, while Officer Maddox is amidships and the balance of the crew are forward, not one being below."

"Well, I am ready, and here are a couple of muskets each for us, and a belt of pistols with cutlass attached, so let us lose no time."

The belts were buckled on, the muskets taken in hand and then the two went on deck.

Ere they caught sight of their officer, and who accompanied him, the two men at the wheel dropped dead, while the *goleta* swept rapidly up into the wind.

It was bright moonlight, the wind was fresh and the sea a trifle rough; but leaving the vessel to take care of itself the two men rushed forward, each with a musket ready for action, they having thrown down the weapons which had already done their deadly work.

Red Fred sprang from a gun-carriage in alarm, for he saw that the tables were turned upon him, but though he fired his pistol quickly at Ravel it was his last shot, as that officer sent a bullet into his brain, and forward rushed the two victorious men to attack the remainder of the crew, now reduced to six men.

They were fired upon as they advanced, and Ravel was wounded, but his fire and that of Rollo was better aimed, and cries for quarter at once went up from the group of now terribly frightened mutineers, and the two men had won the mastery and saved the ship.

CHAPTER XV.

RAVEL'S REPORT.

THE discovery of Queen Felice, from the bluff where her mother and herself had watched the coming in of the *goleta*, that three of the men at the sweeps were chained there, proved conclusively that something had gone wrong with the vessel.

When he jumped into the gig to come ashore Ravel had left the one man without irons in charge, still leaving the other three ironed.

Landing at the wharf in the lagoon on the village side of the ridge, and with a salute to the people gathered there and asking many questions of him, Senor Ravel strode rapidly up the hill toward the cabin of Queen Felice.

As he approached Felice saw that his face was haggard, his eyes deep-set and a look of suffering was upon his lips, while his head was bound about with a handkerchief, and one sleeve of his jacket had a red stain upon it.

"Officer Ravel, welcome home; but you seem ill and to be suffering, so let me offer you a glass of brandy."

Ravel sunk into a chair placed for him by Madam Chevallo, while Felice quickly brought a decanter of brandy and a massive silver goblet and poured out a generous drink for him.

The man quaffed it at a swallow and seemed sadly in need of it.

After a moment the color came into his face and he revived, while he said:

"It was the reaction, Queen Felice, upon arriving at last in port; but I'll feel better now."

"And you are wounded, I see, so mother and I will soon dress your wounds," and placing a little gold whistle to her lips Felice blew two loud, shrill calls, which brought the negro and negress at a trot to her cabin.

"Quick, Congoo, get warm water, and you,

Bucksha, get the medicine-chest and fetch it here."

"Let me tell you of my cruise, Queen Felice," said Ravel.

"Not now, for your wounds must be first dressed, and then you can talk, for there is no hurry."

"I have a bullet in my shoulder, queen, and this cutlass blow on my head, but neither is over severe."

"Yes, both are severe," replied Felice, as she quietly examined the wounds, and then, taking a probe from the chest brought by Bucksha, skillfully sought for the bullet.

"I have it," she said, as she soon after found it, and then it was extracted with nerve and skill, while Ravel never flinched.

Next the cut on the head was stitched up and both wounds dressed, after which Senor Ravel said that he felt as good as new.

"Now, Officer Ravel, I will hear your report, after you have told me where you met the Arrow, and if Captain Lamonte is in your wake or has gone on a cruise."

"I have not spoken the Sea Arrow, Queen Felice, though I saw her; but I will tell you of her after I have reported my cruise," was the reply.

"As you please, Senor Ravel," was the quiet reply, and Felice added:

"Your cruise seems to have been one of hardship and peril."

"It has been both, senorita, for the third night out from the Louisiana Coast there was a mutiny on board the *goleta*."

"Ah! a mutiny?"

"Yes, senorita, and led by Officer Maddox, the man we knew as Red Fred."

"An officer leading a mutiny?" said Madame Chevallo.

"The temptation was too great, madame, for he knew that the *goleta* still had the treasure on board in the secret locker, and he sought to get possession of it, turn the *goleta* into his own vessel, coming to the stronghold and forcing the people to make him chief, while his firm resolve was to demand that you should become his wife."

The face of Felice paled at this, but she said in an unmoved manner:

"Officer Maddox shall be made an example of which shall serve as a lesson to warn other aspirants for the leadership of the Lagoon Rovers and the hand of their queen, that I am mistress here, and shall so remain."

The face of Ravel flushed with guilt, but he answered:

"It was my pleasure to punish by death the daring mutineer leader, senorita, though he gave me this bullet-wound in my shoulder."

"But for the seaman whom you know as Rollo the Chaplain, our *goleta* would have been lost and I would have been killed."

"Red Fred and seven of the seamen turned mutineers, while Rollo, pretending to do so, informed me of the intending mutiny, and together we attacked the eight, and after a desperate struggle, won the mastery."

"They cried for mercy, and when shown it rushed upon us, and I received this cutlass-wound on the head; but again we mastered them, and the three remaining mutineers were put in irons and I forced them to aid in the working of the vessel."

"We were caught in a terrible storm, and worn out as we were, I was forced to run for shelter to a lagoon."

"When the blow was over I stood out and held close inshore, to suddenly discover a strange sail, a schooner-of-war, and coming out from under the land a large Mexican brig-of-war."

"I at once ran into hiding again, and taking my gig, ran down to the battle, which was now being waged between the two vessels, for the schooner was the pirate-hunter known as the Sea Soldier."

"And a Mexican and American fighting, Senor Ravel?" asked Felice, in surprise.

"Yes, queen, and the fight began by the Mexican brig, which was forced to raise a white flag, and then, as though having made a mistake, to raise the United States flag and salute it."

"The brig then stood seaward while the American held on inshore and ran into the Hacienda Harbor of Don Ravera."

"I held on to a point where I landed, and obtaining a position of observation, beheld in the harbor at anchor, with the United States flag hoisted above her decks, the Sea Arrow, Captain Lamonte's craft, and without a doubt the prize of the American schooner."

CHAPTER XVI.

A BITTER BLOW FOR FELICE.

At the words of the commander of the Treasure craft, a cry broke from the lips of Felice, while Madame Chevallo, always so calm and dignified, sprung to her feet as though she had received a shock.

Felice seemed for a moment like one struck a mortal blow, but she quickly recovered and asked:

"What does it mean?"

"It means, senorita, that after I parted with

the Sea Arrow she met the American schooner and was taken by her."

"But Lamonte's vessel was fully armed and manned, yes, and equally as powerful a vessel as the schooner."

"Yes, queen, but the American commander you know is a most dangerous foe."

"He has struck many a death-blow at piracy in the Gulf, and he was the one who rescued the Senorita Ravera from Captain Lamonte, at the time the latter so cleverly captured the Don's yacht, as you remember."

"The American has been dogging us ever since and coming up with the Sea Arrow has fought and taken her."

"You think there can be no mistake?"

"None."

"You are sure that it was the Sea Arrow you saw in the Hacienda Harbor?"

"I know her but too well."

"She was not there at the will of Lamonte?"

"She had the American flag at her peak, senorita."

"Might not that have been a ruse?"

"Then, senorita, why did she not open upon the schooner when she ran in?"

"I cannot understand it."

"Well, senorita, let me say that I saw officers in the United States naval uniform upon her decks, and American tars as well."

"She saluted the schooner as she came in to an anchorage near her, and I was assured that she was a prize."

"I had my glass with me, and it showed that the *goleta* had been in action, though she seemed to have been little damaged in rig and hull, so I think the American officer carried her by boarding, and sent her under a prize crew into the harbor while he fought the Mexican brig."

"Now the brig was almost double his strength, as I could plainly see, and she is commanded by Captain Urbana and manned by a picked crew, yet, had she not hoisted her white flag for to cease firing, the American would have captured or sunk her in twenty minutes more."

"I saw that the Don had fortified his pass into the harbor, and had the battery manned by his own people."

"This has been done since Captain Lamonte ran in and kidnapped the Senorita Ravera."

"After convincing myself that Captain Lamonte was a prisoner, his vessel a prize, I crept back to my boat and returned to the *goleta*."

"It was a run back of many leagues, and I could not find my way into the lagoon by night, so remained outside, suffering greatly with my wounds."

"At dawn I found the lagoon, and the *goleta* was all safe as I left it, for I had chained the mutineers to the deck, and left Rollo in charge."

"Then you came to the stronghold?"

"I did not leave the lagoon until night, Queen Felice, fearing to sight the schooner, and knowing my inability to escape."

"I could only set sail enough to get steerage-way, and ran into the lagoon at dawn this morning, and, as you may believe, wholly prostrated with suffering, loss of sleep and fatigue."

"You have done nobly, Lieutenant Ravel, and your face shows how much you have passed through, and I appreciate it all."

"I appreciate it the more, as I have been led by various acts of yours and reports of you, to doubt your sincerity."

"Doubt me, Queen Felice?"

"You doubt me?"

"I confess frankly that I had not the confidence in you I could wish, and when Captain Lamonte returned from his run to New Orleans after the Treasure *goleta*, and reported having placed you in command to bring the prize in, I felt sure that he had made a mistake, and sent him at once in search of you."

"It was while in search of me that he found the American schooner," said Ravel with some show of feeling.

"Yes, and to his cost; but your delay is explained by the mutiny you had on board the *goleta*, and few men, placed as you were, would have won victory from seeming sure defeat."

"You have done nobly, Officer Ravel, and again I thank you, while I will prove my confidence in you now by placing you in command of the band until the fate of Captain Lamonte is known."

"I thank you for your confidence thus shown, Queen Felice, and will endeavor to prove worthy of it."

"As the Sea Arrow is a prize, she will doubtless be soon sent to New Orleans, and I would suggest that I be allowed to put all necessary repairs upon the *goleta*, man her with what men we have here, and be in wait for her sailing, for by recapturing her we can rescue the prisoners on board, not to speak of regaining a splendid vessel and some treasure."

"Yes, the very thing, so give your orders at once, and it will, I hope, be the means of rescuing Lamonte, for he must be saved, Ravel, he must be saved," and Felice spoke with considerable earnestness.

"Queen Felice, I will do all in my power to retake the Sea Arrow, Lamonte and the other prisoners; but when you have heard from me that the man you trust, the man whom your father, Chief Chevallo, trusted with much power,

is a traitor to you and to our people, you will be glad to leave him in the hands of the Americans to swing up to the yard-arm for his crimes."

CHAPTER XVII.

RAVEL'S TRIUMPH.

If the charge of Officer Ravel against Lamonte fell with a bitter blow upon the heart of Felice, it caused a feeling of joy to Madame Chevallo, for she hoped at last that the man she so hated could be proven all that she believed him to be, and that her idolized daughter might be convinced of the fact.

She, however, said nothing, but glanced furtively at Felice to note the effect upon her of this bold accusation of Officer Ravel.

At first she hardly seemed to realize the accusation, and glanced from Ravel to her mother inquiringly.

The latter then asked:

"Do you mean to accuse Captain Lamonte of being a traitor, Officer Ravel?"

"I do, Madame Chevallo. I make the charge that Captain Lamonte is treacherous to Queen Felice and her people."

Then Felice arose quickly, and stepping close up to the wounded outlaw officer, said, almost fiercely:

"Officer Ravel, prove your charge against Lamonte the Rover, and I will bless you to my dying day; but, fail to do so, and I vow to you I'll have you heavily ironed and hurled from this cliff into the sea!"

Ravel did not flinch at the savage threat of the beautiful girl.

If she had expected him to do so, she was disappointed, but she kept her eyes fixed upon him with all their burning intensity.

As for Madame Chevallo, she gazed at the officer with a look of hope in her face that showed how much she longed to hear him prove his words.

Ravel had expected an outburst, for he knew that Felice loved Lamonte with all her heart; but, he was perfectly placid, and in an even voice responded:

"Queen Felice, why should I come to you with a charge against Captain Lamonte which I cannot prove?"

"Because he is a prisoner, perhaps even now dead, slain in his combat with the American schooner, for in no other way could the Sea Arrow have been taken except through Lamonte's death," was the passionate response.

"She was taken, senorita, and Captain Lamonte was not slain, for I forgot to tell you that I saw him seated at the stern-ports of the Sea Arrow."

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly, senorita, for I recognized him with my glass, and was not over three cables' length from him."

"I saw him lean out of the stern-port and look down into the sea, though I am convinced that he was in irons."

"And now that he is a prisoner, and in irons, under sentence of death, you make the charge, against him of treachery, Senor Ravel?"

"His condition has nothing to do with it, senorita, but I do emphatically make the charge knowing well the result to myself if unproven, that he is a traitor to you and to our people."

The man spoke with a solemnity that seemed to impress Felice, for she said impatiently:

"I asked you for your proof."

"You shall have all the proof that I can give."

"I am waiting, senor."

"Well, queen, I will begin by saying that Captain Lamonte bought a coaster off the Balize, and then ran with her into a bayou where the Sea Arrow could remain in hiding."

"In the garb of the coaster's crew he and eight men went up to New Orleans on the little vessel, and several days after he returned to the Sea Arrow on the deck of the *goleta*."

"I was ordered on board, and taking me into the *goleta's* cabin he told me that he had recovered the craft without firing a shot or paying a dollar."

"He said that he wished me to serve him and he would make my fortune."

"The money subscribed by our people to buy the *goleta*, as a prize for sale, he had pocketed, going to see the shipping agent and telling him that he was a coast planter wishing to buy a plantation yacht."

"After banking hours he gave his check for the amount of purchase money, and repairs, asking the agent to have her put at once in the best of condition."

"Then he asked to put his plantation crew on board and see how the *goleta* handled."

"The agent consented and in this way Captain Lamonte ran off with the vessel."

"He had paid for her?"

"With a bogus check only, senorita."

"Ah!"

"Then he told me that he had in the secret lockers of the *goleta* a very large fortune which he had no idea of sharing with our people."

"He said this, Ravel?"

"He did, queen, and more, gave me a chart, with, at my request, written instructions of how to find an island in the Bahamas."

"To this island I was to go with the *goleta*, and in some way I was to get rid of my men, so that few would know his plan.

"He, meanwhile, would come on to the stronghold, pretend to know nothing of the *goleta* and go in search of her.

"Having failed to find the *goleta* he would return and report her lost, or that I had run off with her, and under pretense of visiting Vera Cruz, he would sail in one of the small vessels from the stronghold, come to the island in the Bahamas where I awaited him, and paying me my share of the treasure, would run to the hacienda of Don Ravera, kidnap his daughter, and after he had landed with her on some foreign shore, he would give the *goleta* into my keeping to cruise as a pirate if so I willed.

"Such was his plan, Queen Felice."

"Your proof, senor," hoarsely commanded Felice who was as pale as death now.

"His chart here, senorita, and instructions in his own handwriting."

"And you?" gasped Felice, when she saw the proof.

"I was not the traitor he deemed me, and so came to you with the Treasure craft.

"Had Captain Lamonte been here I intended to accuse him before you."

"Senor Ravel, I believe now all that you have said, and you, senor, are henceforth captain of the Red Rovers of the Lagoons," and unable to utter a word more, Felice turned and walked rapidly away, while from her mother's lips came a fervent:

"Thank Heaven! at last she knows him as he is!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

SENOR ROLLO'S SECRET MISSION.

As he did not wish then to disturb Felice by his presence any longer, Ravel arose and said to Madam Chevallo that he would go and have the *goleta* hauled out upon the ways up the lagoon, and all the force at once put upon her to put her in the best possible condition for sailing at the earliest moment.

The three mutineers were ordered ashore in irons, to be confined in the "pen" of the stronghold, and the *goleta* was hauled alongside of a wharf and her guns taken off to lighten her, while she was stripped of her sails and all spars down to her masts.

Ravel was seated in an easy-chair overlooking the work, and fires were built at night so that the men could work several hours longer, and the result was that the *goleta* was ready to go upon the ways at dawn.

With sixty men at work upon her, calking, repairing, painting, fitting spars and sails and rigging the gun-tackle, there was every chance that the vessel would be ready for sea within ten days, and Ravel was determined to fit her with heavier spars, that would give a larger expanse of sail area than she had ever before carried.

In the morning Felice sent for him, and when he saw her face, he knew how deeply she had suffered.

Hers was one of those cases where a woman, though loving unworthily, loves with her whole heart and soul, and so had she given her first affection to Lamonte.

Now she knew that he was treacherous to her, and the fact that he meant to desert her and force the Senorita Ravera to become his wife changed her love into hatred in the twinkling of an eye.

Of course Ravel had deceived her in part, but this she did not know; but the pirate officer had felt that his strongest point was to play upon the jealousy of Felice and then she would hate where she had loved.

As he now visited her, he could see that his blow had fallen heavily, and yet in an unmoved tone she said in a kindly way:

"How are your wounds this morning, Captain Ravel?"

"Far better, I assure you, Senorita Felice, thanks to your skill as a surgeon."

"I wish to re-dress them this morning and to tell you not to overtax yourself, for you must not break down."

"No fear of that, senorita, with the prospect of retaking the Sea Arrow ahead of me; but I have a proposition to make which may meet your approval."

"What is it, Captain Ravel?"

"To send one of the small coasters we have, with several men on board, pretending to be on the way to Vera Cruz, and put into the Hacienda Harbor under stress of weather."

"For what purpose?"

"To discover if the American schooner is there, and also the Sea Arrow."

"Ah, yes."

"Rollo would be a good man to send, senorita, and he could ascertain just when the Sea Arrow was to sail for an American port and who is to go in her."

"The very thing we should know, Captain Ravel, so give your orders to dispatch a craft at once, sending Rollo if you deem it best."

"He is true as steel, senorita."

"If you trust him I am content," answered Felice, in a way that made Ravel's heart bound with joy, and he began already to feel that he

would yet win the pirate's daughter and her fortune.

After his wounds were dressed, he returned to his post of duty, and at once ordered Rollo to fit out a small craft for the reconnoitering cruise to Hacienda Harbor.

Rollo selected two men only, and set sail that evening, and as though nature favored him, a storm came up, which he took advantage of to run into Hacienda Harbor at daylight, under pretended stress of weather.

The days passed on at the stronghold, the men, women and even children being kept busy at work upon the *goleta* and her sails, and ten days after her arrival she was again in the water and her guns on board.

As her sails were being bent on one morning the little craft in which Rollo had sailed ran out of the lagoon into the lake and was greeted with a cheer, for all had begun to feel anxious as to her safety, remembering the night of storm which had followed her sailing.

It was only a day's run to the Hacienda Harbor, and when a week went by without Rollo's return, Felice, and also Ravel, began to feel very anxious.

But she had returned at last, and flying across the lake soon glided alongside the wharf, and, accompanied by Ravel, walked up to the queen's quarters on the bluff.

Felice was pacing to and fro, pale and nervous, and her haggard looks told that she had not yet become reconciled to the treachery of the man she loved.

But controlling her emotion by an effort of her strong will she said:

"Be seated, Senor Rollo, and let me know the result of your cruise."

CHAPTER XIX.

ROLLO'S REPORT.

"I OBEYED Captain Ravel's orders, Queen Felice, and set sail for the Ravera Hacienda Harbor, the same which Captain Lamonte entered to kidnap the Senorita Ravera," began Rollo, in his low, quiet way of speaking, like a man who did not like to hear himself talk.

"You found the harbor then?" and Felice bit her lips in her effort to be calm, for the mention of Lamonte's kidnapping Senorita Ravera had cut her to the heart.

"I found the harbor, queen, and was glad really to take refuge in it after dawn, as we had had a very ugly night of it in our little boat, twice having to lay to."

"I ran in and found the battery erected since our visit there to be quite a strong one, with a guard on duty, whose duty it was to call the people of the hacienda in case of any suspicious craft approaching."

"He did not give the alarm upon seeing us, apparently not regarding the smack as dangerous, and I ran in to an anchorage near shore."

"Was the Sea Arrow there?"

"Yes, queen."

"A prize?"

"She was, senorita."

"And the American schooner?"

"Was there also, queen."

"What flag did she show?"

"The United States colors, queen."

"And the colors over the Sea Arrow?"

"The same, senorita, with an American commander and crew on board."

"You pretended to be in distress?"

"Yes, senorita, and begged a spar to rig us a bowsprit, for I had purposely carried mine away."

"I saw on the deck of the schooner-of-war, as I passed under her quarter, one whom you know, senorita—"

"Ah! Captain Lamonte?"

"No, queen, it was the lad Clover whom we all believed to have been killed by Captain Lamonte."

The face of the young girl flushed at this, remembering as she did that she had secretly aided the lad to escape; but she cried:

"Then he was not killed after all, if you are right in supposing the one you saw to be Clover."

"I am not mistaken, senorita, for I took other opportunities to convince myself that I was right, and fearing to be recognized, for the lad was in uniform, I kept very close, pretending to be sick, while the two men, whom he did not know, did the going ashore and to the vessels for spars."

"Did you hear how the *goleta* was captured?"

"After a square fight, senorita, and carried by boarding."

"And Captain Lamonte?" asked Felice, choking back a sob.

"Well, senorita, if it was any other man than Captain Lamonte I would believe what the men I talked with said, but I do not think he is born to be drowned."

"Ah! you heard that he was drowned, and you cannot believe it so, feeling as you do that he is destined to be hanged?"

Madam Chevallo looked at her daughter with surprise, so thoroughly did she have the mastery over herself, when she had expected an outburst when Rollo had spoken of harm befalling Lamonte.

"The seaman told me, queen, that the night of

the arrival in port of the vessel, with Captain Lamonte on board in irons, he in some way managed to drop out of the stern-port and went to the bottom, weighted down as he was with manacles on both ankles and wrists, and heavy chains connecting."

"Senor Rollo, Captain Lamonte is no man to take his own life," calmly said Felice.

"So I believe, senorita."

"I am sure that he has escaped them, though leading the Americans to believe that he took his own life," Ravel remarked.

"They grappled for his body, but did not find it, and as a small boat was missing from those belonging to Don Ravera, some supposed the chief had made his escape in some miraculous way, but Captain Dare of the schooner, his officers and the Don seem convinced that he felt all was lost for him, so dropped from the stern-port into the sea, preferring drowning to hanging."

"And I am convinced that he made his escape," firmly said Felice.

"As I am, Queen Felice," rejoined Ravel.

"Mother, what do you think?"

"I believe as you and Captain Ravel, my child; but when was it that he made his escape?" answered Madam Chevallo, anxiously.

"Just twelve nights ago," Rollo answered.

"Then where is he, Felice—why has he not returned here?" Madam Chevallo inquired.

"I do not know; but I have not the remotest thought that he is dead."

"Captain Lamonte knows this coast and these lagoons thoroughly, Queen Felice, and if he escaped, and in a small boat, he would have come here at once."

"But, coming by night, may he not have discovered the return of the *goleta*, and knowing that his treachery was discovered, put at once to sea again?"

"That might be, and if he has, it is to get another vessel, and so we have cause to dread him—do you not think so, Felice?" asked Madam Chevallo.

"Yes, I believe that Lamonte would be guilty of any crime now, and if he has the chance to secure a good vessel, his first blow will be against those who were his friends," and Felice spoke with deep earnestness, while Ravel muttered to himself:

"She hates him now as sincerely as she once loved him, so I have every reason to hope."

"But, queen, I believe you have cause to dread first another foe, for I heard it whispered at the hacienda that Captain Dare intended to make an attack upon your stronghold, with both the schooner and *goleta*, aided by the force which the Don could muster, and they had already secured a pilot who knew these lagoons."

"The boy! it is Clover!"

"Then, indeed, we must fly from here, and at once."

"Senor Captain Ravel, get the people together, load the larger prize-vessels in the lagoon harbor, and be ready to sail this night," cried the Buccaneer Queen, excitedly.

"But where would you go, Felice?" asked Madam Chevallo.

"To Captain Lamonte's retreat on the Bahama island, where he ordered Senor Ravel to go and await him," was the quick response of the young girl.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SEA SOLDIER'S MISSION.

As Rollo had stated there was a plan afoot to attack the Lagoon Rovers in their stronghold, and Clover, the one time boy prisoner of the pirates was to be the pilot into the intricate passes up to the lake.

Clover had made a pledge to Felice, when she had aided his escape, that he would not, for a specified time, lead an expedition against the stronghold of the Lagoon Rovers, as the young Buccaneer Queen well knew that it was in his power to do.

And this pledge he had kept up to the time he had named, and which had expired while the schooner-of-war Sea Soldier and her prize the Sea Arrow were lying in the Hacienda Harbor.

When at last he had acted as pilot to the stronghold it was found to be wholly deserted.

The cabins were there but untenanted, the fort however had been stripped of its guns, and the little fleet of pirate prizes taken had disappeared.

Not a sign of life remain except a few prowling dogs and cats who welcomed the invaders with every demonstration of delight.

Whither the Red Rovers of the Lagoons had gone not even Clover could guess.

The lad had never heard of their having another retreat, though he knew that at times the *goleta* had sought refuge in an inlet on the Gulf Coast not far from the entrance to Mobile Bay, where there was a secret channel which a vessel could enter at high tide drawing twelve feet of water.

To this place the schooner sailed, while the *goleta*, under command of the Don to whom she belonged, returned to the Hacienda Harborage.

While on the vessel of Lamonte the lad recalled that she had run into this haven near

Mobile Bay, and upon arrival off the inlet he had gone in ahead in a small boat and sounded for the channel, finding it after a long search.

The Sea Soldier had then run in, but the beautiful wooded shores of the inlet had no pirate camp upon them, and not a trace of a vessel was visible at anchor there, or in hiding among the several bayous emptying into it.

With no thought of where the Lagoon Rovers had found a refuge, the schooner headed for New Orleans and there Captain Cecil Dare found the orders which caused him to set sail for Washington City for further personal instructions from the Government.

The return of the Sea Soldier, as has been already made known, enabled the lad known as "Clover" to return from his wanderings, after his many strange and thrilling adventures, to gladden the hearts of his mother and sisters who welcomed him back as though from the grave, and were filled with pride that the Boy Wanderer had won his way to the rank of a midshipman in his country's service.

At that house where all had been so happy, for Mark Cloverfield's married sister had also come on a visit, to see her gallant young brother, Captain Cecil Dare had visited, and he had at once been adopted into the family while Mirian was forced to admit that the handsome young sailor was every inch the hero which Mark had pictured him.

After a short stay there Captain Dare had set sail in the Sea Soldier, which had been improved in many ways, wholly refitted, her sail area enlarged and in every way made into a cruiser to be dreaded by any foe she might meet.

As Midshipman Mark Cloverfield, the Boy Wanderer accompanied him, and his brother officers and the men were soon forced to admit that no better seaman ever trod a deck in spite of his years.

The orders with which the Sea Soldier sailed on this second cruise southward were very nearly those which Captain Dare had had on his former voyage, for he was to go on a pirate hunting expedition.

The free rovers of the sea, especially those in the Gulf, Caribbean Sea and West Indian waters were becoming more and more a terror to merchant vessels, and the Government had decided to act promptly and decidedly to rid the seas of these pests.

In his year's service there Cecil Dare had made a name for himself, and his fleet schooner had become a terror to the cruisers under the Black Flag.

Appreciating his valuable services, and the fact that if he had a still fleetier vessel he could do better service, the Government had ordered him home for consultation as to securing a speedier craft.

But Cecil Dare had suggested improvements to the schooner he had which would increase her speed, while a heavier battery and a few extra men in his crew would make her far more formidable, and these suggestions were at once carried out and thus it is we find the Sea Soldier bound southward upon her pirate hunting cruise, several months after the flight of the Buccaneer Queen and her Rovers from their stronghold among the Lagoons of Mexico, and readers will more readily understand the scenes that follow in my romance of the lawless skimmers of the sea.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PLOTTERS.

THE running in of the Mexican brig-of-war Relentless into the harbor of Vera Cruz, and her departure before dawn naturally created considerable surprise and talk in the town.

Word came up from the Castle San Juan d' Uloa that she had passed in a crippled condition, and gone to sea in a like manner after but a few hours spent off the town.

This could not be accounted for by the curious, and all were on the *qui vive* to know just what it all meant.

Next, after several days came a report that Captain Almo Urbana and his vessel were in trouble, and this rumor reached the ears of the two men most interested ashore in the affair and they at once met to discuss the situation.

These two men, the two men in Vera Cruz who were living double lives—the banker, Louis Escalon, respected by all and yet recently the proprietor of a store which had on sale smuggled and piratical goods, with booty obtained by robberies in the mountains by Henrico's Highwaymen, and Senor Valverde, a gentleman gambler, an alleged miner of wealth, and who was in reality none other than Henrico the highwayman himself.

These two dual-lived worthies were suspected by no one for what they really were, and as card sharps as well, and the report regarding their *tool*, another of their stripe, Almo Urbana, captain of the Relentless, somewhat startled them.

Was the mine beneath their feet about to explode, or was it only Almo Urbana that was to be hurt, they wondered.

So they at once met together in the banker's elegant home for a talk over the ugly rumors floating about the town regarding Captain

Almo Urbana, and his visit to Vera Cruz by night with a crippled vessel, in which he had at once put to sea again without delay.

"What does it mean, Valverde?" asked the banker.

"I am surely at a loss to know, for I was not aware that other than you and I knew of the running in of the Relentless that night," was Valverde's response.

"Of course the report of the coming in had to be made from the castle, but there they are trying to say very ugly things, too soon after Urbana's departure, for anything to be found out about him."

"True, for he had first to go and repair his vessel, as I understand it, in some friendly port, at the expense of the Mexican Government of course."

"Then he was to throw off the mask and turn pirate openly, cruising the Gulf for all game worthy his capturing."

"Yes, in which he was to have so much for himself, vessel's expenses and crew, and we were to get the balance."

"I understand, and one share would pay enormously if he was successful in even a small degree."

"Of course! but he surely cannot have turned pirate in the crippled state of his vessel, and captured some merchantman, who has reported him."

"Perhaps so; but we can find out what vessels have come in since he sailed, and send a man aboard to know if they were pirated at sea."

This advice was acted upon, and a messenger was at once dispatched upon the duty of finding out the desired information.

In a couple of hours he returned to report that no vessels had come in with a report of having been brought to by a pirate, but one captain had met the crippled brig far out in the Gulf and heading in a southerly course.

This the two plotters could not understand, and while they were in anxious doubt as to what it all meant a servant announced a Government official from the City of Mexico.

The banker was somewhat startled when he read upon the card the name of a man prominent as the naval secretary of the Mexican Junta, Captain Morena Del Blas.

"Admit him," he said quickly, and then to Senor Valverde remarked:

"What in the name of Old Nick brings him to see me, and at this hour of the night?"

"You will soon know, senor, and I had better retire."

"Do so after he enters, and retire by that door, closing it behind you, but be on hand in case you are needed."

The banker and gambler haughtily arose as a gray-haired man of dignified appearance entered and was announced as:

"Senor Morena Del Blas."

The banker had met him before, and greeted him most cordially, ordering wine and refreshments brought and presenting him to Senor Valverde, who then expressed his intention of retiring, and departed by the door which Escalon had told him to.

After liquors, wines, refreshments and cigars were placed upon the table by the servant, who retired, Senor Del Blas said abruptly:

"You will pardon my disturbing you at this hour, Senor Escalon, but I came expressly from the City of Mexico to visit you upon a matter of vast importance."

"I am more than willing, senor, to be permitted the pleasure of meeting you again, and if there is aught that I can do to serve you you have but to command me," said Luis Escalon, in his insinuating way, though he had to confess himself very ill at ease at the unexpected and untimely visit of his visitor.

"We are wholly alone, senor, I trust," said Senor Del Blas, as he heard a sound at the door through which Senor Valverde had disappeared.

"Wholly, senor," was Escalon's reply, though to himself he muttered:

"It was that fellow Valverde getting his ear to the keyhole; but I am glad he is within call, for I do not know exactly what this visit means, and I am not to be trapped, if that is what he has come for."

Then turning to his visitor he said blandly:

"I am all attention, Senor Del Blas."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SECRETARY'S MISSION.

THE secretary of marine quietly lighted a cigar, and then said:

"Senor Escalon, it is about Captain Almo Urbana that I have come to see you."

Escalon started at this, but calmly asked:

"Any news of him, senor?"

"Yes."

"He was in port some time since, and I saw him for a short while, but he said he had to sail at once upon a special mission, and it seems went to sea again that very night."

"That is just what he did do, senor."

"Under orders, of course?"

"No, without orders."

"This is strange, for though a little wild Urbana has always been noted as a splendid officer."

"Yes, but I learn that he has gotten into trouble financially."

"Indeed, senor?"

"Yes."

"It is supposed that he is a very rich man."

"So many believed, but I have it that he mortgaged his property to you that he might purchase and fit out the brig to cruise in."

"I do not know how this became public; but he did come to me for a certain sum of money, and as he has no heirs, left me executor of his estate to recompense me should he be killed, and that is all I know of it."

"I am glad to have your statement of the case, senor; but I am inclined to believe that Captain Urbana has done that which will cause you heavy loss."

"Indeed, senor, may I ask in what respect?"

"Well, we have reason to know that he has turned pirate—"

"Senor!"

"It is true, Senor Escalon, and in that case his estates are forfeited to the Government, as one of its officers, and you will lose them as well as the sum you advanced to pay for his brig."

"You astound me, senor, and I must doubt your information I assure you, for Urbana cannot be a man who would be guilty of such a crime."

"I will give you my authority, Senor Escalon, and then tell you why I have come to you, feeling that you can help the Government and yourself as well in this matter."

"The Junta has met and seriously considered the situation, and the unanimous opinion of us all was that I should at once seek you, state the case fully, and propose to you a plan to extricate us from the unfortunate position in which Captain Urbana has placed us."

"I will do all in my power Senor Del Blas," and the banker found it an effort to remain calm, for he did not know yet but that Senor Del Blas had stronger cards to play.

"To explain fully, now that I know you advanced the money to buy his ship, he went to sea and headed for the seaside home of Don Ramon Ravera."

"He remained there for a long time, idly making love to the Senorita Rachel, when he should have been at sea."

"He sought to break her engagement with an American officer, and induce her to wed him, hoping her fortune would free him of his financial misfortunes."

"Then he put to sea, and after a cruise accomplished, he again headed for Ravera's estate, and came upon the vessel of the American officer to whom the Senorita Rachel is betrothed."

"What his motive was in attacking him we can surmise, for with a larger vessel, heavier battery and a third more in crew than the American, there is no doubt but that he sought to sink him, thus removing a dangerous rival from his path."

"Worsted by the American, he had to cease firing, raise a white flag, and send a boat aboard his victor to tell him a story about having heard his schooner had been captured by Lamonte, the Red Rover of the Gulf, and he supposed he was fighting that buccaneer."

"But he did not find out his mistake until he was getting very thoroughly whipped."

"The American demanded the raising of the United States flag, and a salute to his vessel as he sailed by, and very rightly, too, and this settled the affair, of course, without an appeal to our Government, while Urbana's claim for believing he was a pirate was founded upon the fact that there had been a combat between the schooner and Lamonte's *goleta*, but the latter was captured, not the American."

"Captain Cecil Dare had sent his prize on to Ravera's harbor, as the pirate craft had been captured from the Don, it having been his yacht, and he soon followed her, giving up his prize to her former owner, which was most generous in him."

"It was, indeed, senor."

"This American is also the one who worsted Urbana at cards, and then in a duel, and hence you can see cause for the captain's venom against him."

"I can well understand it, Senor Del Blas."

"Now Urbana came here by night, in a crippled condition, did not report, and put to sea again."

"But three of his officers were convinced that he did know who the American was, and from certain acts of Urbana's with men among his crew, that he meant to turn the brig into a pirate."

"My dear senor! can this be possible?" exclaimed Escalon, in a tone of horror.

"These three officers, two of whom are lieutenants, were so convinced of the fact, that they rowed ashore, soon after Urbana left the vessel here, and at once started for the capital to report their suspicion to the Junta."

"We gave them a hearing, and then heard how Urbana had at once sailed that night, and we have word that in his crippled condition he brought to and robbed a Mexican merchantman the day after leaving this port."

"My dear senor, you astound me."

"It is true, Senor Escalon, and my mission to you now is to say that the present finances of

the Government just now precludes the possibility of our purchasing, fitting out, arming and manning a vessel-of-war, and we beg you to do so for the purpose of running down and capturing this pirate, Urbana, for he is nothing more."

Escalon drew a long breath of relief at this. It was his help that the Government needed, and he at once replied:

"Senor Morena Del Blas, I shall gladly obey the Government's wish, and to-morrow shall begin the good work, for if he has turned pirate, Captain Almo Urbana must be hunted down and hanged at the yard-arm."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BANKER'S PLAN.

UNTIL a late hour the Senor Del Blas remained conversing with Escalon, the banker, and when he at last took his departure an agreement had been arrived at to the satisfaction of both.

Hardly had the door closed upon the Secretary of Marine when Senor Escalon went to the room whither he had sent Henrico Valverde and found that worthy asleep upon a lounge.

"Come, Valverde, you are no more asleep than I am, and you have heard all."

The gambler arose dreamily and said:

"No, I did hear the first part of your conversation, but when it held no further interest for me I went to sleep."

"Well, come, for I have considerable to say to you."

"He has gone?"

"Yes."

"I was badly scared for you at first."

"As I was for myself; but the Government wants my aid."

"I see."

"That fool Urbana was betrayed by three of his officers."

"I heard as much, and the more fool he."

"Yes, for he has been sounding his men on the subject of turning pirate and some of them have betrayed him."

"No doubt."

"They, the three officers, came ashore and hid for the City of Mexico, and Urbana just saved his neck by standing out to sea that night."

"He was wise."

"Yes, but foolish to capture a Mexican craft so near port, for it was done not far off-shore, at night, and two of the crew escaped in an open boat and reaching Vera Cruz reported to the Governor of the San Juan d'Uloa."

"I hope Urbana will not make any more mistakes."

"He'll be all right once he hoists the black flag, and our money will roll in then."

"But the Government wishes you to fit out a vessel to go in chase of him."

"Certainly, and I shall do so."

"You consented then?"

"Yes."

"Well, I got so deuced sleepy about that time I heard no more, so tell me what happened."

"I only wish you were a sailor!"

"Why?"

"I'd place you in command of the vessel I intend to send out after Urbana."

"Thanks heartily, but I have no ambition to dance in mid-air, suspended by my neck."

"Your neck is in danger now."

"Not in the least, for you alone know me as Henrico the highwayman."

"But do you really intend to send a vessel after Urbana?"

"Yes."

"You cause me for the first time to consider you an arrant fool, Escalon."

"Why?"

"For sending after Urbana."

"Why not?"

"If he is taken then he gives us both away."

"That is why I send after him."

"To have him confess all?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Not to catch him."

"Ah!"

"If the Government sends a vessel he may be caught."

"I see."

"If I send a vessel he surely will not be."

"I understand now and ask pardon for deeming you for a moment a fool."

"You are a very nice man, Senor Louis Escalon."

"Much obliged; but you see the Government's sea force is limited, and it hoped by sending Urbana out to capture several good pirate craft, which could be added to the Mexican Navy as cruisers."

"I see."

"If Urbana's brig was lost, the Junta felt that it would not be their loss, or rather the Government's, and so they had him buy his own vessel for the rank given him."

"Now, cramped in finances, the Junta wish to send a vessel after Urbana which will cost the Government nothing, recapture the brig, hang the traitor captain and thus have all come out serene in the end."

"A good idea for the Junta."

"Yes; but now I am selected as the one most interested."

"How so?"

"They know I hold a claim on Urbana's estates."

"Well?"

"As a traitor they are forfeited to the Government, so my claim is void."

"If I capture him, my claim is allowed, but I must risk more money to get what is my due."

"I see, and you over-reached yourself in not turning Urbana's estates into cash at once?"

"I did, but then they are increasing rapidly in value, and as no one but Urbana and I know what he really has, if I take what is registered of his, I can come out even on the balance, in fact make a snug advance, see?"

"Yes, I see that you are the smartest man in Mexico, Senor Escalon."

"I consider it a compliment from you, as you did not except yourself, Senor Valverde."

"You are too kind; but do you intend to send out this vessel?"

"We do."

"We?"

"Yes, for you are to be partner."

"On what terms?"

"Well, I have full power to arm and equip a vessel, manning it as I please and to choose my own commander."

"You are to share the expense with me, and from the moment she sails she is to raise the black flag, and all her deeds are to be laid upon Urbana."

"Hal hal hal!" laughed Valverde.

"The vessel I have in view is the yacht of Don Ramon Ravera."

"Excellent! but the commander?"

"He is now beneath this roof, and you shall meet him," was the smiling response of the banker, and rising he left the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST.

SOME days previous to the calling of Senor Morena Del Blas upon the banker, a small boat was struggling with a severe storm upon the Gulf of Mexico, and some two leagues off the coast.

There was but one occupant in the boat, and had he not been a skillful sailor the little boat would not have held up long under the heavy blow and rough seas.

She was reefed down and staggered along on her course which lay in the direction of Vera Cruz.

The man's face was sternly set, as though he fully knew his danger, and he had a haggard look that indicated suffering.

Still his will kept him up and the boat held on her way, bounding, tossing, pitching, diving, and at times seeming as though she would never rise.

"I cannot stand it much longer, and if the gale does not lull I must beach her."

"I am utterly worn out," he said aloud.

And instead of lulling the storm grew wilder until at last human nature was almost worn out, being pressed beyond endurance, and he turned the prow shoreward.

The little craft went flying along, lurching fearfully and the shore rapidly grew nearer.

A wild surf was breaking upon it, but here and there was a shoal where the waters had less depth and toward one of these the seaman headed his little vessel.

The gale was increasing every minute, and there was only one chance and that was to beach the boat for she was leaking badly.

At the tiller crouched the helmsman, his eyes fixed ahead and his face growing sterner and paler as he neared the spot where soon it would be a struggle for life in the mad water.

The man was Lamonte the Red Rover of the Lagoons, and he was upon his way to Vera Cruz.

He had been sent for by Mark Cloverfield, with Captain Cecil Dare's consent, if not his aid, when they knew who he was, that he was the wicked half-brother of the American captain, the step-brother of the lad.

Mark had arranged the escape for him to appear to have sprung overboard with his irons on, as though he preferred drowning to hanging.

The lad had gotten a boat for him, with several days' food on board, taken him to a point from whence he could make his escape and then set him free.

After some time spent in wandering the pirate captain was nearing Vera Cruz when overtaken some leagues off-shore by one of those hurricanes which so suddenly sweep down upon a vessel in the southern latitudes.

For hours did Lamonte hold on against it, hoping to save his boat; but his provisions had given out, he was weak from want of food and worn down by arduous exertions in the management of his little craft all alone, and at last, as the storm increased in violence he headed her for the shore to beach her and then get ashore as best he could.

She struck hard and with a spring he was in the wild surf.

But he was a superb swimmer and after a fierce battle for life he managed to gain a footing and staggering ashore he sunk exhausted upon the sands.

It was night when he awoke from his uncon-

sciousness, and he was stiff in every joint; but he arose and walked along the beach, still holding in the direction of Vera Cruz.

The next night it was when footsore, worn out and half starved he stopped at the door of the elegant home of Banker Escalon.

"I would see the Banker Escalon," he said to the servant who answered his summons.

"The Senor Escalon is at dinner and cares not to see such as you," was the insolent reply.

A blow well delivered sent the servant upon his back just as the banker appeared crossing the hall.

In an instant he faced the stranger, who said quickly:

"I just punished your impertinent servant, Senor Escalon, who, because I am just home from a long cruise and shipwrecked, failed to recognize that I was a gentleman."

Banker Escalon turned pale at sight of the man, but quickly grasped his hand while he said:

"You did right, my dear friend! but you look ill indeed, so come in and I'll soon make a new man of you."

Then turning to the servant who was rubbing his bruised face and wondering how he could have made such a mistake, he reprimanded him severely and bade him have one of the best guest chambers in the house prepared for the stranger.

This the servant hastened to do, glad to escape from beneath his master's eye and the presence of one who though appearing very ill could strike such a blow.

The banker led the way at once to the dining-room and poured out a glass of brandy for his guest, who dashed it off eagerly and then ate a slight repast, after which he was shown to his room.

"I will have clothes sent to your room, and after you have rested I will come and have a talk with you, to know why you have come here?" said the banker.

"It will not take very long, senor, to tell you," was the reply and the buccaneer was left alone in the elegant quarters where, in his then condition, he seemed sadly out of place.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO OF A KIND.

WHEN Banker Escalon left the room of his unexpected guest his face wore a troubled, anxious look.

He sought his library, and with a cigar between his teeth, began to pace to and fro.

"Why has that man come here?" he mused aloud.

"How did he know me, and what can have brought him to see me?"

"Ah! I have it, for his vessel was captured by the American captain, and in some way he has made his escape; but what caused him to come to me I do not know."

This thought seemed to worry him, and to gain relief he went out, wending his way to the Monte Casino.

He played cards there for an hour or two, but his mind was not upon his occupation, and at last he arose and returned home.

He went to his guest's room and found him serenely sleeping.

But the few hours' rest and food had refreshed Lamonte, and he awoke quickly and welcomed his host.

"Sit down, Senor Escalon, and we will have a talk," he said pleasantly.

"How is it you know me?" asked the banker, in wonder.

"Ah, that disturbs your mind, I see, so I will explain."

"But you recognize me, of course?"

"As—"

"Don't hesitate, but speak out."

"As Lamonte, the Red Rover of the Lagoons?"

"Yes, I am Lamonte; but you remember our last meeting."

"I wish to know where you have met me?"

"Senor, I know Vera Cruz well, and in one disguise and another I have often been here, as you know."

"We have met a score of times in the office of your junk-shop, where you have on sale piratical and smuggled goods."

"It is false!"

"Senor, don't get angry; but I met there your manager, he who knows you only as Simon Haas."

"He attends to your shop for you, and, pretending to dwell in the City of Mexico, you visit him once each month for a reckoning."

"Now he knows you, as I said, only as Simon Haas, of the City of Mexico, and your disguise as a Spanish Jew is excellent."

"Of course when I was in Vera Cruz I have met there Senor Simon Haas, and I have always been disguised."

"But on meeting you, who received my booty to dispose of it for me, I have not feared to remove my disguise, and thus you knew me well as I am."

"Still you tried to have me believe that you were not disguised and so I dogged your steps, saw you go to a lonely place up the street, enter it, and a light glimmered within."

"Half an hour after the light was put out, the door opened, and out came one whom I had seen on other occasions as Banker Luis Escalon.

"I dogged you to your home here, saw you enter, and then returned to that lonely house, which was unoccupied, but which I afterward learned belonged to you.

"I had marked where you hid the key upon coming out, so found it, entered, and soon had a light.

"In a chest there I found your disguise as Simon Haas, the wig, false beard, spectacles, paints for making up, clothing, and a mirror.

"I left all as I found them, but kept my secret, knowing that it would be useful to me some day.

"That day has come, for my vessel was captured after a hot fight with an American schooner—"

"The Sea Soldier, commanded by Captain Cecil Dare?"

"The same."

"You are fully his equal in strength, or rather your vessel, battery and crew were?"

"Yes, but that man is a marvel, and I did not feel so very wretched over my defeat when I saw him attacked by a large Mexican brig and not only refuse to run for it, but force his foe to cry for mercy in a very short while."

"You were on board the schooner, then?"

"Yes, a prisoner."

"And then?"

"I made my escape through bribing a lad who was once my prisoner, and put to sea at night in a small boat."

"Alone?"

"Oh, yes; and I found it hard work, for I got blown out to sea in a gale and my provisions gave out.

"But I made a small port after several days and fitted out for my cruise to my stronghold."

"Well, you found another vessel there I suppose, and are ready to try your fortune again under your sable colors?"

"I found my stronghold wholly deserted, for the American schooner had been there and raided the place, piloted there by that very lad, I suppose."

"So you have no vessel?"

"I am ashore, senior, without a vessel, gun or crew; but I made my way to Vera Cruz, and again caught in a severe storm was forced to run my craft ashore and beach her, and I had a struggle for life that was very nearly my last one.

"But I came afoot here and at once sought your home, when I found your shop closed for the night."

"And I suppose you are penniless, and now seek my aid, knowing as you do the secret of my having a shop where as Simon Haas I sell piratical and smuggled plunder?"

"No, senior, I am not the poor wretch you take me for, as I have ample funds with me, or gems that will bring a good price.

"I came to you for a place of refuge, and to seek your advice about getting another vessel, as I wish to go to sea again, having several plans on hand to carry out and which will enrich me, and you also if you will lend me a helping hand."

"Captain Lamonte, you have not sought me in vain for I will aid you all in my power," was the earnest reply of Senor Escalon.

CHAPTER XXVI. THE BANKER'S ALLY.

THE reader has already surmised that the man to whom Luis Escalon referred, when he told Henrico Valverde, that the one to command the vessel to be fitted out to go in chase of Urbana's brig, was then in his home was none other than Lamonte the Rover.

The night before he had arrived at the banker's home, as has been seen, and Senor Escalon considered it a stroke of good fortune that the Secretary of Marine should have called at the very time that he had a man there to place in command of the vessel which was to be sent after the traitor captain, Almo Urbana, or nominally sent in pursuit of the brig Relentless which he commanded.

So he went to the room of his pirate guest, whom he found, late as it was, poring over a model he had just drawn of a craft combining seaworthy qualities and speed.

"Senor, come with me to my library, for I have a friend there whom I wish you to meet."

Lamonte had rapidly recuperated from the sufferings and hardships he had undergone, and in a neat suit of Luis Escalon's which fitted him well, looked very handsome, and commanding in appearance.

He followed his host in silence and upon reaching the library Senor Escalon said:

"Captain Henrico, allow me to present to you Captain Lamonte, who is upon the seas what you are upon the land."

The two men regarded each other curiously.

Henrico the Highwayman had often heard of the famous buccaneer, and was amazed at finding him sojourning in the house of the banker.

Of Henrico the pirate had also heard and was amazed at beholding a handsome, courtly gentleman in the one of whom it was said that he knew no such thing as mercy to man or woman.

Each seemed impressed with the appearance and presence of the other, and Lamonte stepped forward and extended his hand while he said:

"I am glad to meet captain Henrico and only regret that he is not a comrade of the sea."

"And I find Captain Lamonte far different from the man I had pictured him, after all I had heard of his daring deeds upon the seas," answered Henrico Valverde in his pleasant way, then there was always something sinister about the gambler if one only could see beneath the outer surface.

Still he was sincere now in what he said to the buccaneer for he admired a man who was bold and wicked, and his admiration for Luis Escalon the banker was because he was such a very clever villain.

"Well, seniors, I am glad to see you so pleased with each other, and as my admiration for you both is intense it will be quite a love feast for us to be together.

"Now, however, we will talk business, for you remember, Valverde, that I have just had a visitor who wishes me to undertake a certain task for him."

"Yes, and which you can readily do with the valuable aid of Captain Lamonte."

"I am wholly at the service of Senor Escalon," said Lamonte, bowing.

"Well, Senor Monte, let me state the case to you plainly.

"The Senor Captain Almo Urbana, of the Mexican Navy, commanding the brig-of-war Relentless, has fallen from grace in the eyes of his Government, and it seems has hoisted, or intends to hoist, the black flag.

"The desire of the Government is for me to fit out a vessel to run him down, and I have pledged myself to the task.

"Now I do not care to have the gallant captain run down, oh, no! I would not go back on a friend, as I believe him to be; but I do wish to send a vessel to sea, to pretend to run him down, and at the same time never find him.

"Do you see?"

"I do, senior."

"And while looking for the Relentless you can, if you command my vessel, do some business that will be to the interest of all three of us, yourself, Senor Valverde and myself, for he will be my partner in the purchase and fitting out of the vessel."

"And I am to be the captain, senior?"

"You are."

"Have you a vessel?"

"No, but I believe one can be purchased for a handsome sum from Don Ramon Ravera, especially if he knows that it is for the Government, and to hunt down a pirate."

"It is my old vessel, senior, which I captured from him—and with you I believe he will sell her for a good cause. I will undertake to buy her if you will furnish the money."

"I will do so—Ah! what is this?" and the banker turned toward the door where a servant, a moment after, appeared, for unknown to his servants he had, without, a secret spring which signaled their approach toward his private quarters, thus preventing any eavesdropping.

The servant entered with a letter in his hand and said:

"It was brought to the door, senior, by the skipper of a coaster who just came into port. He said that he had been spoken by a brig-of-war that requested the delivery of the letter to you."

The servant disappeared; then Senor Escalon broke the seal of the letter.

What he read caused him to spring to his feet his face livid with rage as he said:

"Captain Lamonte, you are to go to sea, and capture and hang Captain Almo Urbana!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

CAPTAIN ALMO URBANA'S LETTER.

NEVER in all his acquaintance with him, had Henrico Valverde seen Luis Escalon so excited as he seemed at what he had read in the letter just brought in to him by the servant.

His face was livid, his eyes burning, and he paced to and fro for a minute before he could control his emotion.

Then he became calm, threw himself into his easy-chair again, and said in a voice wholly unmoved:

"Senors, the letter which I just received is from one whom a few minutes before I said was my friend.

"I retract the words, for he is my worst foe.

"Captain Lamonte, to you, senior, let me say that I befriended one with financial aid who was on the verge of ruin.

"I lost nothing, I made a fair interest on my money, I admit; but when he was in the direst distress I came again to his aid, and, with Senor Valverde, furnished a vessel, fitted her out, armed and manned, and sent her to sea under his command, the Government believing that he had done so with his own money and giving him a commission for his generosity.

"This man has disappointed us, for he went on a cruise to win a rich wife instead of the special service he was ordered upon.

"He nearly lost his vessel in a fight with the American schooner Sea Soldier and was guilty

of acts which have caused his Government to outlaw him, and arrange with me to send a craft after him.

"I was discussing this with you, when my servant handed me this letter, which I will read and let you understand the situation.

"Now, seniors, listen to the letter:

"BRIG OF WAR, RELENTLESS.

"At sea off Mexican Coast.

"SENOR LUIS ESCALON:—

"MY DEAR SENOR:—As the world is before me for good or ill, let me be frank with you at once and say that I have decided to look out wholly for Almo Urbana, and not endeavor to enrich land-sharks, be they bankers or highwaymen ashore.

"You paid for my brig, you and your *confrere* Henrico Valverde, and gave her into my keeping.

"If Senor Valverde desires a settlement for his share, I refer him to you who hold my estates in keeping, and which several times over are of more value than your expenditure upon my brig and advances to me.

"I have taken the bit in my teeth and shall run away with myself, my name and honor, as well as your vessel.

"In other words I shall be my own master, and not be under the control of the Senors Escalon and Valverde.

"The desertion of several of my officers at Vera Cruz, caused me to throw off the mask sooner than I had expected to, and unable to trust others I headed for Jamaica, put my vessel in perfect trim, sent those ashore who feared to sail under the black flag, and then sailed on a mission of piracy wholly my own.

"By a coaster which I bring to under the Eagle and the Serpent flag. I send this letter to you that you may be in no doubt as to my designs, which are to come out boldly as a buccaneer.

"The mask is off now, the die is cast, and you will hear of me under the name of Almo, the Buccaneer, for I care not to stain the name of my honored ancestors, that of Urbana, with the brand of piracy.

"I thank you for the means of becoming what I am, you and Senor Valverde, and should occasion require you to sail the seas, for the sake of the past I will give you no cause to dread a meeting with

"Your outlawed friend,

"ALMO, THE BUCCANEER."

Such was the letter which the banker read, and at its conclusion Valverde burst out into laughter.

"You seem to see a funny side to the situation," said Escalon.

"I do."

"Pray explain it, that I may also enter into your mirth."

"I am laughing at the fact that the man we deemed our obedient tool, the man whom we sent out to make money for us, has been so clever a rascal as to deceive the renowned Banker Escalon, and the Mountain Footpad Henrico.

"I declare he is a splendid fellow after all, and with the power to act, it would not surprise me now if he ran off with the Senorita Rachel Ravera and made her his wife."

Again did Escalon spring to his feet, while he hissed forth:

"Never! never! that woman is to be my wife; and, Lamonte, I wish you to start to-morrow upon your work of hunting down that fiend, Almo Urbana."

"I am ready to-night, senior."

"Are you good at disguises?"

"I have had considerable practice, senior."

"Then I will charter a small craft, in which you and a dozen seamen can sail for Ravera Hacienda."

"You can pretend to be Government officials, for I will give you letters supposed to be from the secretary of marine, Del Blas, and you can ask Don Ramon to sell his yacht to the Junta, which he will do, and when you get the vessel, then sail to some port under the Mexican flag and secure a crew."

"Do you understand?"

"I do, senior; but the purchase money, for I have only a couple of thousands?"

"I will give you the money."

And Luis Escalon kept his word, for the next day Lamonte the Rover sailed upon his mission.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ALARM.

THE Hacienda Ravera was a model home of luxury and comfort.

It was located upon the shores of an inlet, or bay, putting in from the Gulf and forming a very pretty sheet of water and a safe anchorage.

The channel led through two headlands, and one of these was heavily wooded, the other had been made into a fort and fortified.

It was a good protection to the hacienda half a league away upon the bay shore, and here was kept a sentinel constantly on the watch for any dangerous craft coming from seaward, for since the kidnapping of his daughter by the Red Rover of the Lagoons, Don Ramon had organized his ranchmen into soldiers and sailors.

At a signal from the fort two-score *vaqueros* would dash away from their herds and ride along the headland to the fort, while as many more servants, tillers of the ground and attendants of the hacienda would also fly to the rescue to man the guns.

The yacht, which had won unenviable fame as the vessel of Lamonte, after being restored by Cecil Dare to the Don, lay at anchor off the wharf and had a crew among the fishermen at a hamlet a league up the coast and who could also be summoned by a signal from the fort, and reach their vessel within half an hour's time.

The hacienda itself was almost as strong as a fort, yet most comfortable.

It had upon its walls pointing seaward wide covered verandas, or piazzas, and its plaza within and flower gardens were like a fairy scene.

There were horses without number in the stables, boats in the bay, along with the Sea Arrow for a longer cruise, and a library full of books.

Fruits of all kinds were in abundance, a few neighbors dwelt not far from the hacienda, and with game and fish for days of sport no one could suffer ennui at Hacienda Ravera.

The Don was happy there in the love of his beautiful daughter and the care of his vast estate, for Don Ramon Ravera was said to be the richest man in Mexico, and the lovely Rachel was sole heiress to all his wealth.

Rachel, with her harp and guitar, her books, flowers, fancy work, horses and boats, and her few friends, was also happy, especially so in dreaming of her handsome American sailor lover, Cecil Dare, who had rescued her from the clutches of Lamonte the Rover, and had proven the slanders of Almo Urbana false as to his being an outlaw himself.

He had returned to the Don his yacht, had given Urbana's vessel a severe whipping in full view of the hacienda piazzas, and then had sailed for the north, promising to return ere many months to visit her again and some day claim her as his wife.

And so she was fondly hoping for his return when, one day, as she reclined in her hammock among the orange groves near the hacienda, a signal was set upon the fort which caught the eye of her peon maid Irma, who was enjoying a rest upon a *serape* near her mistress.

"Senorita, the fort signals a vessel," said Irma springing to her feet.

In an instant Rachel was out of her hammock and cried, as she saw a white puff of smoke come from a gun followed by the roar of the piece:

"Yes, and the signal is given for the yacht's crew to come also.

"Can it be a pirate, Irma?"

"I do not know, Senorita; but the sentinels know Captain Dare's schooner so it cannot be your lover."

Rachel blushed at her maid's allusion, and replied:

"No, there are secret signals for the schooner to exchange with the fort, so it is some stranger—but see the *vaqueros* coming!

"How they ride!"

Across the plains came at mad speed nearly half a hundred horsemen, the jingle of their spurs being distinctly heard by Rachel and her maid.

"There come the hacienda people!" cried Irma, and from the walls about the structure, like a swarm of bees, came two-score attendants at a double-quick for the fort.

"There is father!" cried Rachel as a distinguished-looking man rode out of the hacienda plaza and went at a gallop toward the fort.

"Ah, Rachel, my child, you are there, are you, and awake to the situation.

"I will soon report what the alarm is," and kissing his finger-tips to his daughter the fine-looking Mexican *caballero* dashed on.

"See, senorita, the *vaqueros* are at the fort," and as Irma spoke the cavalcade dashed out of sight into the chaparral at the land end of the little fortress and a moment after had dismounted and run to the guns.

"And there go the hacienda people," cried Rachel as the company of attendants double-quickened into the gate of the fortress.

"Bravo! see the yacht's crew!" said Rachel a moment later as at the upper end of the inlet, half a league distant, two long boats manned by a dozen-oars, suddenly shot into view and headed for the Sea Arrow at anchor off the hacienda wharf.

On came the boats with a rush, carrying a wall of foam before their bows and in ten minutes they had rowed down the inlet and were alongside of the yacht!

A few moments after the Sea Arrow's stern had been warped around, and an anchor let fall.

Thus anchored fore and aft her broadside commanded the narrow pass into the bay, and a vessel running in would thus have a raking fire from the Sea Arrow, and a broadside fire from the fort to run the gantlet of, with a pretty fair force to encounter on foot should she succeed in making a landing on the inlet shore.

"Now we are ready for them, so we'll wait and see the cause of the alarm," said Rachel as she walked toward the hacienda with her peon maid, to take up a point of observation upon the upper piazza.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DON RECEIVES A LETTER.

THE cause of the alarm at the Hacienda Ravera was a vessel then standing in toward the inlet and having rounded a point of the coast two leagues below the pass.

Instead of holding on out into the Gulf, the vessel had gone about and headed on the star-board tack, directly for the mouth of the inlet.

Of course this would indicate that her destination was the harbor of the hacienda, and the sentinel at the fort at once ran up the danger flag and soon after fired the gun which was the call for the crew of the yacht from their hamlet a league away.

A walk through the forest and a couple of miles' pull in the boats at the head of the inlet, and always kept there for that purpose, carried them to the yacht, so that no vessel could enter the inlet without finding the defenders prepared for her.

The vessel which had caused the alarm had the appearance of being a Mexican coaster.

She was of some forty tons burden, carried considerable sail, and though she did not appear to be an armed craft she might prove to be, and and so the sentinel had given the alarm, for just such looking boats were often found to be dangerous.

There appeared to be but few men upon her decks, yet her decks might conceal a half a hundred, and it was best to be on the safe side.

Such were the Don's orders, and an alarm was generally liked by the people, while it gave them a practice which some day might stand them in good stead.

The commandant was of course the Don himself, but then he had officers under him from among his people.

One commanded the guns, which were manned by the hacienda servants.

The *vaqueros*, under their chief cowboy, were the infantry, all being armed with rifles, while the yacht's crew of forty men were under a sailing-master who was the head of the fishing hamlet where they made their home.

"She will hardly arrive before nightfall, Potosi," said the Don, watching the stranger through his glass.

"No, senor, not before," answered the officer of the guns, watching the setting sun.

"Well, when she runs in half a mile nearer, throw a shot over her."

"Yes, senor."

Nearer came the strange vessel, and soon a puff of smoke from one of the guns, followed by a shot flying across the bows of the craft, caused her to sweep suddenly up into the wind and lie motionless.

"Throw a shot over him to send a boat ashore, Potosi."

"The Don's order was obeyed, and a white flag went up to the fore, while a boat left her side containing four seamen and a fifth person in the stern.

Over the stern of the boat floated a small Mexican flag.

Coming into the pass the boat was hailed by Senor Potosi:

"Boat ahoy! what boat is that?"

"A messenger from Senor Captain Morena Del Blas, the secretary of marine, with a letter to Don Ramon Ravera," came response.

"Ay, ay, senor; present my compliments to the officer in command, and ask him to run in with his vessel to an anchorage, and I will welcome him."

"Yes, senor," and with this the boat put back for the vessel, which soon after stood in, just as darkness began to settle upon the waters.

"We have nothing to fear from that craft once she enters the harbor, Potosi, even though she be different from what she claims to be, so I will go to the wharf and meet this envoy from the secretary of marine," and Don Ramon left the fort, mounted his horse, awaiting in the sheltered corral, and rode toward the hacienda.

There a servant took his horse, while he walked down to the wharf to welcome the messenger.

As the vessel swept into the harbor she anchored near the inlet and a boat put off from her side.

It had six oarsmen now and a coxswain, while the moonlight revealed an officer in uniform in the stern-sheets.

Landing at the wharf the latter stepped ashore and was met by Don Ramon.

He wore a cloak and a naval captain's uniform, had gray hair and a full beard, and bowing low said:

"Have I the honor of meeting Don Ramon Ravera, senor?"

"I am Don Ravera, senor."

"Permit me to present myself as Captain Montevallo, of the Mexican Navy, and an envoy from Senor Del Blas, the secretary of marine, from whom I bring this official letter."

The Don welcomed his visitor warmly, and at once led him up to the hacienda, where the letter was at once read, for Captain Montevallo stated that its contents were urgent.

Dinner was ordered at once, and the envoy was presented to Senorita Rachel, while the Don read his letter from the secretary.

It bore the official seal and was as follows:

"RESPECTED SENOR:—

"The bearer, Captain Montevallo, who presents you this, visits you with full power to negotiate for the purchase of your armed yacht, the Sea Arrow, which is the only vessel available at present to send in pursuit of Captain Almo Urbana, once an honored officer of our service, but now outlawed and cruising under the black flag as Almo, the Buccaneer.

"For the honor of our country it is hoped that you will allow the sale of your yacht to the Government, that this deserter, traitor and outlaw can be hunted down at once.

"Your price Captain Montevallo is instructed to pay you without question.

"Feeling that under the circumstances you will render this service, I remain with distinguished regard,

Your obedient servant,

MORENA DEL BLAS,

"Secretary of Marine."

"P.S. Permit me to suggest that you keep a bright lookout for this pirate, as, acquainted with your estate, he may seek to do you injury in some way."

Such was the letter received by Don Ramon Ravera.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MEXICAN PATRIOT.

"SENOR CAPTAIN, to relieve your mind, permit me to at once say that the Sea Arrow is at your service.

"Now we will go to dinner," said the Don, as he entered the parlor where his daughter was being entertained by their guest.

"You are a patriot, my dear Don," said Captain Montevallo, and he offered his arm to Rachel, and went into the grand dining-hall of the hacienda.

The visitor was a man of refinement, conversed well, and yet with a certain hesitancy of speech which both the Don and Rachel noticed, while it at times seemed almost like an accent.

He was a man past the meridian of life, as his gray hair and beard indicated, and stated that he had spent much time in foreign seas, seldom being at home.

He had been selected for the special service which Senor Del Blas had referred to in his letter, from his intimate acquaintance with the haunts of the free rovers from Yucatan to Key West, and among the Bahama and West Indian waters.

After dinner Rachel retired, the captain bidding her farewell, as he said that he must at once leave.

Then he explained more fully to the Don the situation, and what a blow it had been to the Government to have a respected officer turn pirate as had Captain Almo Urbana.

"Now, my dear Don, you have but to name your price for your beautiful vessel and I will hand you the amount, as I am so instructed by the secretary of marine."

"Captain Montevallo, permit me to present to the Government my yacht for the service you have in view, for I cannot and will not accept any pay for her."

"My dear senor! are you in earnest?"

"I am, senor."

"Then you are one patriot among thousands, senor, and the Government will appreciate your generous gift and noble action," said the delighted captain.

"I am more than glad, senor, to extend this favor, as the yacht is larger than I really desire, or expected to build, so would make a first-class cruiser.

"Then too she has been tainted by the stain of piracy, her decks have been reddened with blood spent in an infamous calling, and the black flag of the pirate has left a shadow upon her which I can never rid my thoughts of, for, you remember perhaps, she was captured by that arch-fiend Lamonte and used as his buccaneer vessel for quite a while?"

"It strikes me I have heard something of this.

"But you regained her?"

"Yes, through the ingenuity of an American officer who captured the vessel, and with her Lamonte, and gave her back to me."

"Ah! and Lamonte died of his wounds, I believe?"

"No, he was in irons and dropped from the stern port of his captor's vessel into the sea and was drowned."

"Too bad."

"Senor?"

"I say that it was too bad that he was not hanged."

"Yes, though some believe that he escaped; but as to Captain Urbana, if the yacht is instrumental in capturing and hanging him, I shall deem her well paid for and that she has wiped out the stain put upon her by Lamonte."

"You know Urbana then, Don Ramon?"

"I know him intimately, senor, for he was my guest here for weeks.

"He deceived my daughter and myself with false charges of piracy which he made against the American officer to whom I referred, and to whom I owe so much, for he was the rescuer of Senorita Rachel from that pirate Lamonte."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, senor," and the Don told the story of Rachel's rescue by Cecil Dare, and then of the visit of Almo Urbana at the hacienda, and the charges against the American officer.

He also made known the fact that the Senorita Rachel was betrothed to the handsome American sailor, who was then away on a pirate-hunting cruise.

At last he made a deed of gift of the Sea Arrow to Captain Montevallo, who thanked him over and over again in the name of his Government, after which the two went on board the Sea Arrow.

The little vessel on which he came was then signaled and ran down near the yacht and anchored, when Captain Montevallo said:

"I beg you to take my craft, Don Ramon, for me until you receive another vessel, for I am so instructed by the secretary of marine."

"You will not find her such a bad craft, senor, when you visit her in the morning, and permit me to hand you the key to her cabin."

The Don protested, but Captain Montevallo insisted, and when, half an hour after, the Sea Arrow set sail, the little vessel remained behind at her anchor.

The next morning when Don Ramon met Senorita Rachel at breakfast, he asked:

"Well, my child, what did you think of Captain Montevallo?"

"I did not like him, father, and somehow he reminded me of Lamonte, while I am sure from his speech that he is not a native Mexican."

Just then a servant entered and handed Don Ramon a note, with the remark that the man who had been sent aboard the strange vessel had found it in the cabin.

The Don read a few lines, and then to the amazement of Rachel there came from his lips a most vehement oath, while he sprang to his feet like one who had received a severe shock.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN OUTLAW'S LETTER.

THE note which had been handed to Don Ramon by the servant, causing him to give expression to an oath, had been found in the cabin of the little vessel left by the Mexican captain.

The sailing-master of the Sea Arrow, deprived of his beautiful vessel, had gone on board the coaster in the morning to have a look at her.

The Don had given him the key of the cabin, handed him by Captain Montevallo, and he had decided to see what could be done to get the craft into condition as a substitute for the Sea Arrow.

The vessel was not a bad one, seemed like one that could stand rough weather and was also speedy.

Her cabin was large and not uncomfortable, and a few days' work would make her a very acceptable craft for the Don's pleasure afloat if no comparisons were drawn between her and the yacht.

Captain Carlos, as the sailing-master was called, seemed glad to find her far better than he had expected.

While glancing about the cabin his eyes fell upon a letter pinned upon the table-cover.

It was addressed to:

"SEÑOR DON RAMON RAVERA,
Hacienda Ravera."

Captain Carlos took the letter and found it sealed, so he went on deck and sent it ashore by the man who had rowed him out to the little vessel.

So it was that just at breakfast the Don had received it, and his vehemence, added to his profanity, which Rachel had never known him to be guilty of before, quite startled her.

"Oh, father! what has happened?" she cried, her face paling as the thought came to her that some ill had befallen the American Captain Cecil Dare.

"My child, I have made a fool of myself."

"But what have you done, father?"

"You were perfectly right in your surmise about Captain Montevallo."

"In what respect, senor?"

"That he looked like that devil of the sea, Lamonte."

"Ah! what has happened, father?"

"I beg you tell me?" anxiously said Rachel.

"This letter was found in the cabin of the craft, left for me by the man who was here last night."

"It was written when he boarded the vessel to get his traps, and locking the cabin he gave me the key."

"I gave the key to Captain Carlos this morning, and he sends me this letter."

"May I see it, father?"

"Let me read it to you, my child."

Then aloud the Don read:

"MY DEAR DON RAMON:—

"I do not like surprises, and you will pardon me if I inflict one upon you; but the truth is, I am not dead, as you supposed, not having gone to the bottom in my irons, when a prisoner on board the American schooner-of-war Sea Soldier."

"I made my escape and borrowed a small sailboat from you, in which to leave danger behind me, the danger of the yard arm."

"I went to my stronghold and found it deserted, so without a haven, a vessel or crew, I was left alone in the world."

"But I did not despair, and sailed for Vera Cruz."

"On the way I was wrecked, but I did not give up, and finding that I could, by a little trickery, get

possession of my old vessel, your beautiful yacht, I forged a letter to you, and carried out my plan."

"I was prepared to pay you the money for the vessel, but your great patriotism prevented, and so I got command of the Sea Arrow once more, without paying a peso for her."

"When I tell you that I enjoyed my dinner with you immensely, and the society of your beautiful daughter once my captive for a brief spell, I know that you will believe me, as also that she holds me captive now with love's fetters, which I fear I can never break."

"My wig of gray hair and false beard, by candle-light served well to disguise me, and so I was supposed to be what I represented myself, while I am in reality one of whom you will soon hear again upon the high seas in my role of the Red Rover, though always—

"Faithfully yours,

"LAMONTE."

This letter filled the heart of Rachel Ravera with dread.

Her anger at the allusions of the buccaneer to herself gave way to fear, for with that man again afloat, and in the beautiful Sea Arrow, she would dread his coming again to kidnap her, thinking what a large reward her father would pay for her.

"Well, my child, you see that Lamonte is again afloat," said the Don anxiously.

"Yes, father, and I only wish that Captain Dare was in Southern waters now."

"Indeed do I wish so, and if he captured that pirate again I am sure that his first duty would be to hang him."

"There will be no peace in the Gulf until Lamonte is hanged, I fear, father; but suppose I write Captain Dare of his escape, addressing to New Orleans as he bade me do."

"Do so at once, and I will have the letter sent by messenger to catch the Vera Cruz mail," said the Don.

The letter was written and sent, the Don also forwarding a report to the Junta of the fraud practiced upon him and the capture of his vessel, with the document brought by the pretended Mexican captain.

Then Don Ramon went on board the vessel left by Lamonte, to have her put in the best trim possible, and visiting his post placed four men on duty there.

As a night guard the little vessel, with a crew and signals, was to anchor a league off-shore every night, so as to report the coming of any craft in sight in time for preparations to be made to meet her.

Still, with all these preparations to defend the hacienda, the Don did not feel at rest, and as the days went by, thought of going to Vera Cruz to dwell for awhile, for his dread was wholly on account of his beautiful daughter.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SECOND BLOW.

THE little vessel in which Lamonte, disguised as "Captain Montevallo, of the Mexican Navy," had sailed for Hacienda Harbor, had been gone over a couple of weeks, and Senors Luis Escalon and Henrico Valverde had received no news of the success or failure of her mission.

These two worthies continued the even tenor of their sinful lives, Escalon admired, respected, and sought after by all the good people of the town, and while carrying on his legitimate banking business, secretly taking advantage of his position to be a cheat at cards, and as Simon Haas, the Jew, being proprietor of the shop where smuggled and pirated goods were disposed of.

Then, too, Henrico Valverde, an acknowledged gambler, also the companion of honorable men, was living his dual life of a man about town of whom no wrong was thought, while he was secretly Henrico the highwayman, going to his band every week or two for a few days, and as merciless as death among them, while he was in Vera Cruz the secret partner of Escalon in crime and fraud.

That these two men should often meet together is not to be wondered at, but they were particular not to be seen too often together in public.

They were wont to part at the Monte Casino, bidding each other good-night, and then, by a preconcerted plan, Valverde would visit at the home of the banker, his own quarters being in a more frequented part of the town.

Three weeks had the vessel with Lamonte been gone, when one night Valverde dropped in at the home of the banker, after having feasted with him half an hour before at the Casino.

"Any news?" he asked, as he entered the banker's private room and saw him looking over a letter which had been brought for him while he was away at the Casino.

"Yes, a letter from Lamonte, though I have not read it yet."

"Sit down and we'll see what it says."

"There are brandy and cigars, with wine if you prefer it."

"Thanks," and Valverde dropped lazily into an easy-chair after lighting a cigar.

Then Escalon broke the seal of an inner envelope and read the letter aloud, with oaths and ejaculations, which I leave out in going over the contents of Lamonte's communication.

The letter was dated at sea, and as follows:

"ON BOARD BUCCANEER SEA ARROW.

"At sea off Sisal.

"MY DEAR SENOR ESCALON:—

"Soon after this letter reaches your hand, sent by trading vessel to Vera Cruz from Sisal, you will begin to hear once more of Lamonte, the Red Rover, for I am afloat again in my beautiful vessel Sea Arrow, and am collecting me a crew as rapidly as I can that will stand by my flag of the Scarlet Arrow."

"With this explanation allow me to tell you that I carried out my plot with Don Ramon without a hitch."

"Since my kidnapping his daughter some time ago he has fortified the channel pass to his harbor, and his people are so well trained that I would never have gotten in even with an armed craft, had I intended an attack."

"Strategy accomplished it however, and running in just after dark, I found the Sea Arrow at anchor there with the Don's crew on board ready for action."

"My letters gained me a hearty welcome, and I dined with the Don and his beautiful daughter."

"Then I made known my mission and the Don's patriotism ran away with his reason and he presented, without the payment of a peso, the vessel to the Government."

"Now was not this patriotism sublime and generosity unbounded?"

"As I saved the amount of pocket money, I of course appropriate it for my own uses, and you and dear Senor Valverde can charge your shares to profit and loss, more particularly loss for not a peso of it will either of you ever see."

"Having gained command of my vessel I do not see my way clear to serve two masters in this piracy cruising."

"I always wished to be my own keeper, and have been, so you will excuse me if I do not consider either yourself or Senor Valverde, in partnership with me."

"The amount of money you gave me you can charge to the enormous profits you made in the sales of my goods sent in to Simon Haas."

"That is, let Simon Haas, yourself, pay Banker Escalon, yourself, for what you lose by me now in my appropriation of the money sent for the purchase of the Red Arrow."

"Whatever arrangement you make with Valverde I am sure you will not be the loser."

"In regard to the carrying out of your intention to run down Senor Captain Almo Urbana, now known as Almo, the Buccaneer, I can only say that I will make it my business to find that gentleman, who has so fallen from grace, and if his vessel is the superior of my own then I shall take it, that is all, while with a fellow feeling for another black sheep under the sable flag, I shall give him the goleta."

"If you wish to send out a vessel now to capture both Almo the Buccaneer and myself, be sure and send one that is faster than ours, for I may by that time need a change, especially to a fleetier craft."

"As it would hardly be safe for me to deal longer with Simon Haas, who would have me at his mercy in the way of financial settlements, I shall seek other merchants in New Orleans and Havana, who will be even more liberal in their prices for stolen plunder than is my esteemed friend Escalon, alias Simon Haas."

"Pray present my kind regards to dear Senor Valverde, and believe me

"Your Sea Rover Comrade,

"LAMONTE."

To say there was a duet of profanity between Senors Escalon and Valverde after the reading of this letter would be to draw it very mildly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOR GOLD AND REVENGE.

THE Senor Escalon was not a man to be dealt a blow and not strike back, and Valverde was very much like him in that respect.

They had been hit hard by Captain Almo Urbana's treachery to them, and especially had Escalon to regret it, for unless he captured the traitor officer he would lose his, Urbana's, estates, while Senor Del Blas had pledged them to him in the name of the Junta, if he did bring the fugitive officer back for trial, which, of course, meant hanging.

His money, and Valverde's share, had gone in the brig Relentless, and with a cool good-by from Urbana.

Now came this second blow from Lamonte.

The banker had purchased the little vessel for him to visit the Don in, and given him the funds to pay for the goleta.

The result was that he had lost his little craft, the goleta, and his money, and another cool letter of farewell from Lamonte was all that the two men had to remember this second fugitive with.

Truly, the way of the transgressors was hard; but they each vowed to invest more money to make it harder for those who had transgressed against them.

"What do you think of this letter, Valverde?" asked Senor Escalon, after he had a second time read the buccaneer's epistle to the sinners.

As soon as Senor Valverde could cool down, after his profuse ejaculations, he answered:

"There is but one thing to think of it."

"And that is?"

"Caramba! he has done us."

"Yes."

"Emphatically yes!"

"Well, what are we to do?"

"Do you ask me for my advice, or as a means to tell me that you have decided what to do?"

"What would you do?"

"Send more money after what is gone to get back that which is lost."

"Good!"

"And get with it—"
 "What?"
 "Revenge!" hissed Valverde, with a savageness that was startling.
 "Valverde, you are a man after my own heart."
 "Thank you, though the heart is a black one."
 "But what do you suggest, Escalon?"
 "To carry out just what I would have done had not Lamonte happened here."
 "And that is—"
 "I mean with the offer of Senor Del Blas."
 "Of course."
 "Had Lamonte not have been on hand I would have found some one else."
 "Who?"
 "I wish you were a sailor, Valverde."
 "Thank you, but I prefer dry land—the earth is good enough for me to work upon."
 "Well, as you are not a sailor, I must find some good man who is."
 "That is a good sailor but a bad man?"
 "Exactly."
 "Do you know such a man?"
 "Yes."
 "Who is he?"
 "A naval officer who was dismissed for killing his superior in a duel on his own ship, a desperate man when aroused, a perfect sailor and one whom the Government would be glad to get an excuse for taking back into the fold again."
 "He is the one who was wounded in a duel with Urbana, and hates him as he does a snake."
 "He is a poor man now, running a coaster from Vera Cruz to Sisal, and is now in port, so I will send at once for him."
 "You refer to Lieutenant Martil Juarez?"
 "Yes."
 "The very man; but what about a ship?"
 "I will let him decide as to one."
 "There is not one here suitable."
 "No."
 "Do you know of any?"
 "No."
 "Well, send for Juarez and we will soon know what the chances are."
 "Then you are in for the investment of more money to get back our losses?"
 "And our revenge, yes."
 "Then here goes," and calling for a servant the banker dispatched him to the wine shop where it was certain that the officer referred to as Martil Juarez would be found.
 He had been a young man of great promise, though poor, having risen from the lower walks of life by gallant deeds alone.
 In the midst of his rising fame he had fallen in love with a beautiful girl, who had, urged by her parents, cast him off to catch Captain Almo Urbana, then an officer of Lanceros and believed to be very wealthy.
 "Almo Urbana had run off with the poor girl, and cruelly deserting her, had caused her to take her own life; and Lieutenant Martil Juarez had challenged him for his crime, met him on the field and been severely wounded in the duel which followed, for he lay for months hovering between life and death."
 "Upon returning to his ship his captain, a friend of Urbana, had made some insulting remark about his having more than met his match in the man he sought to finish, and, enraged, Martil Juarez had drawn his sword and attacked his superior upon his own deck."
 "The result was a desperate duel then and there, and the death of the superior at the hand of his inferior officer."
 This act nearly cost Juarez his life at the yard-arm, but his past services were taken into consideration, along with the insult given him, and he was dismissed from the service.
 His spirit broken, the young man, with his ambitious hopes blasted, went upon the downward course, and became the skipper of a small trading-vessel, doing his duty well afloat, but going upon wild orgies the moment he was in port; and his escapades became known to all, yet he had the sympathy of the better people throughout, who considered what his services had been.
 Such was the man who entered the banker's home half an hour after having been sent for to come there.
 He was dressed as a common sailor, his eyes were bloodshot from dissipation, his legs unsteady, and he looked like one in physical and mental suffering.
 "Senor Juarez, be seated please, for I have sent for you upon an important matter," said the banker kindly.
 He bowed in silence and obeyed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"A BRAND FROM THE BURNING."

"SENOR JUAREZ, you have met my friend, Senor Valverde, have you not?" said Banker Escalon.

The sailor arose and bowed, while Escalon said:

"I have seen Lieutenant Juarez at the Casino in past days and am glad to meet him socially now."

The man had seemed not to wish to trust himself to speak, but now said bitterly:

"Yes, in past days, when I held the title

by which you just now addressed me, but which I now hold no longer.

"No, senor, I am but a sea vagabond now, whom no man could feel glad to meet socially."

"Well, senor, I have sent for you, as I said, upon an important matter, so steady your nerves with a glass of brandy and then hear what I have to say."

The sailor gladly accepted this invitation and said in a firmer voice:

"I cannot understand, Banker Escalon, why you have sent for a wreck of manhood such as I, but I am ready to hear what you have to say."

"In the first place, Juarez, let me say that I desire to send you upon a mission of great importance, one of my seeking, but in which the Government is interested indirectly, so I act with authority."

"Yes, senor."

"I know your record as a sailor and daring man, and you are the very one I wish for the service, for it is sea work."

"I understand, senor."

"You command now a little trader between this port and Sisal?"

"I did, senor, but I was dismissed by my owners for drunkenness in port last voyage and sailing a day late, though I came in on my regular day."

"So you are out of work now?"

"Yes, senor, drinking myself to death," was the bitter reply.

"I have that faith in you, Senor Juarez, which tells me that you will cease your dissipation at once and devote yourself to my work."

"If I pledge myself to you, yes, senor."

"If you accomplish what I send you to do, then not only will you receive a small fortune for your services, but you may take my word for it that I will have you reinstated in the Navy of Mexico with your former rank, and every charge against you in the past wiped out."

The man sprang to his feet, and his eyes fairly blazed while he said:

"I pledge myself to the task, senor, heart, body, and soul, and from this moment I am no longer a drunken vagabond."

"With hope in the future I can forget the past and its specters."

"Well said, my dear Juarez, and here is my hand on it, that I will keep my part of the contract, which Senor Valverde is witness to."

"And my hand on it, Senor Escalon, that I keep my pledge to you."

The change in the man was marvelous, for he no longer swayed to and fro under the influence of liquor, but stood upright, his eyes flashing, his whole mien that of one who felt that he was again able to assert his manhood.

He looked upon Escalon as others did, a noble-hearted, generous man, and held not a suspicion that he was what he was at heart.

"Now, senor, I am ready for orders," he said calmly, standing before the banker.

"Be seated, please."

He sat down, and then Escalon said:

"As Senor Valverde dropped in I held him as a witness to our conversation, for he is a man who can keep silent where silence is needed."

"I had a visit from the secretary of marine, who officially reported to me that Captain Almo Urbana—"

"Curses upon him!" broke in a hiss from the lips of Juarez, but without noticing his words or the strange pallor upon his face, Escalon continued:

"That Urbana is outlawed as a pirate for certain crimes committed."

"That Urbana has not a dollar of his own I will tell you in confidence, for his estates are mortgaged to me, and I bought his vessel, so he has left me to mourn his loss more than any one else."

"Should I secure his return, then I hold his estates and get back my vessel, and it is to do this that I now desire to send you upon the duty of hunting him down."

"Ah, Senor Escalon, you have made a man of me, and I'll do your work only too well."

"I feel that you will; but there is another duty for you to perform."

"Name it, senor."

"You have heard of the Rover Lamonte?"

"I have often heard of him, senor."

"Well he has cut out the armed yacht of my particular friend, Don Ramon Pavera, and is again at sea flying the black flag over her decks."

"But I thought that the American schooner, now pirate hunting in the Gulf, captured Lamonte?"

"So she did, and her captain gave the vessel back to Don Ramon, for it was his yacht."

"But Lamonte escaped, the American cruiser has been ordered home, after destroying the stronghold of the Rovers of the Lagoons, and the chief is again afloat in the Sea Arrow."

"Ah! and he is to be my game too?"

"Yes, Senor Juarez."

"Well, senor, I am ready for the duty this very night, though I have not a peso to my name, no vessel, gun or crew."

"I will see to that; but let me tell you that

your duty is to run down Captain Urbana, now known as Almo the Buccaneer, and Lamonte the Rover, and hang them to the yard-arm of your vessel."

"Yes, senor."

"Their vessels you are to bring into port and surrender to me."

"I understand, senor."

"And I will give you a Letter of Marque to protect you and your men from the charge of piracy upon this special cruise."

"I understand, senor."

"Now to the vessel."

"Have you one in view, senor?"

"None, have you?"

"There is no suitable craft here, or elsewhere that I know of, Senor Escalon, but if you will give me a merchant vessel, and let me select my crew, I will promise to capture the very ship I want for the service, and I'll strike only at lawless flags too."

"You are the man for my work, I see, Captain Juarez, so come here to-morrow and I'll give you full instructions, and the money needed."

"Soon after the sailor took his leave and Valverde said:

"Then you do not intend to turn him into a pirate?"

"Ah, no, he is a brand snatched from the burning, and I shall restore him to the navy, while his foe, Urbana, will hang—see?"

"Yes, I see," was the laughing reply of the gambler.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE VAGABOND OFFICER.

"WHAT do you think of him Valverde?" asked Senor Escalon, not minding the merriment of the gambler at his having been guilty of a good deed.

"I think he is the best man you could have gotten for the place."

"You think he is sincere?"

"I know it."

"You do not believe that he will go back to his old life?"

"I do not."

"Nor do I, and yet my confidence in human nature, good and bad, has been terribly shaken."

"So has mine."

"Now I have not the slightest confidence in you, Valverde, good friends that we are, further than your own interests force you to be true to me."

"Nor I in you, my dear Luis."

"Just to think when you knew I was going to Don Ramon's hacienda, under pretense of buying cattle, but really to see why Urbana was staying there with his vessel, that you, believing I had lots of money along, should hold me up on the trail and rob me, causing me to believe it was not you and your men that was guilty of it?"

"Yes, and just to think how you went back on me at the same time by handing over to me bogus bank-bills, instead of good money."

"You treated me shabbily in that, Escalon, for had I robbed you I would have given you your half share according to the agreement between us in all robberies," and the highwayman laughed at his conceit while Escalon remarked complacently:

"We are a precious pair of villains, Valverde."

"We are; but let us discuss the Senor Juarez and his expedition."

"Have you aught to suggest?"

"No, only I believe he will capture and hang both Urbana and Lamonte."

"Heaven grant it: but what think you of his plan of getting a vessel?"

"The very thing to accomplish it!"

"Yes, he will purchase a fleet merchant brig to-morrow, and I will give it out that she sails with a valuable cargo for New York."

"This will cause the pirate spies in the port to send word to their chiefs, and the vessel will be looked for by the lawless rovers, and the biters will be bitten."

"I am really in love with the plan which Juarez suggested."

"As I am; but what will it cost to carry it out?"

"He will want fully eighty men, though but twenty will go on board openly, and each one of them will wish a bounty of ten pesos at least—"

"Eight hundred pesos."

"Yes, and the brig Surprise is in port, Juarez said, and it will take ten thousand to buy her."

"Yes, ten thousand eight hundred."

"She must be stored and fitted up, and a bogus cargo must be put on board, and this will take two thousand more."

"Twelve thousand eight hundred pesos."

"Yes, with a couple of more in pocket for any use that may come up."

"Say fifteen thousand, all told."

"About that."

"Then write me down for my share, and draw it from my funds in your hands."

"When will Juarez sail?"

"Within two weeks, for the report must at once be spread that the Surprise carries out a valuable cargo for New York."

"All right, that will give the spies a chance to warn the buccaneers to be on the lookout for

her; but it is late, so I will go home and come to-morrow when Juarez is here," and Valverde took his leave.

In the mean while Martil Juarez, the vagabond officer, had returned to the wine-shop where he had his squalid quarters.

He had in his pocket five hundred pesos to spend on himself and the men he should select to go with him.

For over a month he had been in arrears to his landlord, who had borne with him because men came there to see him, and so treated to wine.

Now as he came in the wine-shop was nearly deserted, only half a dozen good customers remaining.

"See here, senior, I must have a settlement of my bill to-morrow, or into the street you go," said the landlord roughly.

"Do you mean it, Fernandez?" was the quiet query.

"I do."

"You would put me into the street?"

"I will."

"Yet I have spent thousands in your house, have brought you custom, have paid for my quarters when I have been away at sea for months at a time, and you have jewelry of mine worth a thousand pesos which I gave you to keep for me, and you hold for only a hundred."

"You will turn me out, Fernandez?"

"I'll do it! *caramba!* but I will," was the savage response.

"Why?"

"You are only a vagabond now—a drunkard who can get no work, and if I keep you I'll have to bury you."

"How much do I owe you, Fernandez?"

"Thirty-one pesos."

"For board?"

"Yes, and liquor."

"And how much did I borrow from you on that jewelry?"

"One hundred pesos."

"Then for one year the interest on the money loaned, and my board and liquor debt all told will be just one hundred and forty-seven pesos?"

"Yes."

"Then get my jewelry this minute, and write me a receipt in full, for here is your money, and—"

"Oh, senior, I did not mean—"

"Silence, and obey!" roared Martil Juarez, and the landlord shrunk from him, for now he noticed a change in his manner and appearance.

"Senior, any time will do, and the jewelry is in the bank, so—"

"You lie, Fernandez, it is in your strong box, so get it, or I'll have an officer down upon your pirates' nest within half an hour."

"Mercy, senior, mercy!" whined the landlord, and he hastily got out the jewelry, wrote a receipt for the money due, and tremblingly handed all over to the officer.

"There is your money," and with this Juarez walked over to the table where the half-dozen late lingerers sat, and who had been a witness to what had occurred.

"Torrel, I wish to see you and Rosalie at the Plaza Hotel, for I am going there from here."

"I have work for you," and with this he left the wine-shop where he had been herding so long with the lowest of his kind.

Three weeks after to a day the fleet brig *Surprise* sailed from Vera Cruz, New York bound, and it was rumored that she carried a cargo of gold and silver bullion.

In command of her went Martil Juarez, at one time known as the Vagabond Officer.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LAGOON FLEET.

AN armed *goleta* conveying a small fleet over a sunny sea was a pretty marine picture to one who did not know just what those vessels contained in the way of wicked humanity.

It was an odd fleet of seven vessels all told.

The leading craft was the *goleta* already known to the reader as the buccaneer craft of which Chevallo had been chief, and left as a legacy to Lamonte.

She bore the name of Lady Lawless, and had in her secret lockers the treasure which had been gained by the sacrifice of life and honor.

The repairs made upon her in the lagoon stronghold before sailing, had enabled her to keep her reputation for speed, and, under shortened sail, was now leading the fleet, while all others were crowded with canvas.

Upon the deck of this vessel stood Ravel, as captain, in the place of Lamonte the leader of the Rovers of the Lagoons.

There were also on board, having the cabin wholly to themselves—for Ravel was playing his cards well to win—Felice, the Queen of the Rovers, and her mother Madam Chevallo.

Not far from the *goleta* sailed two smaller vessels of a lateen rig, but not one fourth the size of the Lady Lawless.

Opposite their position, off the starboard stern-quarter, was an American-built sloop of forty tons, and to her lee were three small schooners.

Astern and bringing up the rear was a weather-worn brig with torn sails and a general look as though she sadly needed going into port.

This vessel completed the fleet of seven, which was stretched out for a league over the waters.

The fleet was the Lagoon Rovers on their way to the island of the Bahamas, which had been appointed by Lamonte as his rendezvous with Ravel, his lieutenant in command.

The little fleet had sailed from their secret retreat in the Mexican lagoons, the length of the Gulf, heading west by a point north, and when sighted that pleasant afternoon were due south of the Andros Islands of the Bahama group.

Another day's sail would bring them to their "promised land," and the Rovers were by no means sorry, for their vessels, with the exception of the Lady Lawless and a dilapidated brig, were small, and, crowded with men, women, and children, and quantities of plunder, their lot had not been a happy one.

In spite of their evil lives, the elements had been kind to them in their voyage, for though at times very rough, the sea had not been swept by a hurricane.

Had such been the case, some of the smaller vessels would have been very roughly handled, perhaps too much so to weather the gale, and thus would have gone to the bottom, though their loss would have been the gain of others upon whom they had so long preyed.

In very rough weather Ravel had signaled for the fleet to "lay to" and ride it out.

There was no hurry, and thus the fleet had been safely led across the Gulf.

If a sail had looked suspicious, the stranger had been awed by the number of the fleet and steered clear, so no foe had frowned down upon them.

It was well for the "community at large" that such had not been the case, for had a foe, stronger than the Lady Lawless, hove in sight, Ravel would have quickly left the fleet to its fate and looked out for the *goleta*, its fair passengers and crew, not to speak of himself.

So it was that the Lagoon fleet had sailed the length of the Gulf, and was nearing the rendezvous island for which Captain Ravel was heading.

The day passed into night, and darkness gave way, in its turn to dawn, but the island was not yet in sight.

The skies began to wear a misty look, and Ravel, a skilled seaman, appeared a trifle anxious, fearing a hurricane.

But, soon after sunrise, the lookout aloft sung out cheerily:

"Sail ho!"

All was at once excitement on board, and the signal was run up on the *goleta*:

"Land ahead!"

Two hours after land was visible from the decks of the *goleta*. It was discovered to be a rugged island, wooded here and there and with a bold, precipitous coast.

"That is the island, Queen Felice," said Captain Ravel, getting out his chart.

"See, approached from the eastward the following outline presents itself," and the buccaneer captain pointed to the outline on the chart which was identical with that on the island.

"Where is the harbor referred to, senior?" asked Felice.

"Here on the southward, and the wind is fair for us to run in, and I hope will hold, for it can only be entered and left with a due east, or due west wind, as there can be no beating in or out."

"A storm seems to be threatening, Captain Ravel."

"Yes, seniorita, and I will signal to crowd on every stitch of canvas, for we may get a hurricane and that means the loss of every small vessel, I fear."

The signal was given and obeyed promptly, and though the wind was light the little fleet came swiftly on.

Studying his chart Ravel obeyed instructions and went aloft to the foretop.

From there he could see the waters ahead, and note the channel, running in among shoals and sunken rocks.

The storm was now threatening to break soon, and signals were made urging in the fleet, which, seeming to understand the danger, dampened their sails and helped their vessels on with sweeps.

Leading the way the *goleta* swept into the channel just as an ominous roar was heard, and inky clouds came rolling across the skies.

"Out with the sweeps and pull for your lives!" shouted Ravel, as the lull came before the storm, and the sails flapped listlessly.

The crew of the Lady Lawless sprung to their work; the huge sweeps were out, and with half a dozen men at each, the eight heavy blades struck the water together and the *goleta* moved on her way.

The brig, having no sweeps, lay listlessly upon the waters, while the smaller vessels used every effort to draw ahead, and escape the now roaring hurricane coming on astern.

"My God! they are lost!" cried the Buccaneer Queen, springing upon the bulwarks and clinging to the ratlines, while Ravel said, with his sinister smile, as the *goleta* shot into the break in the cliffs:

"And we are saved, fair Felice!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CLOVEN FOOT.

THE *goleta* had to ship her sweeps to go into the narrow pass which led from the open sea into the island.

It had seemed to them upon the vessel that she was running straight upon a precipice, but, when the *goleta* was only a couple of lengths away an opening became visible, and she shipped her sweeps just in time, at the command of Ravel, who, seeing from aloft the opening, and that the channel widened as it neared the island, had descended from aloft and joined Felice and her mother upon the quarter-deck.

Though the *goleta* glided quickly out of sight of the fleet in her wake, enough had been seen to show those on board that the hurricane had rushed down upon the other vessels with terrible force.

A wall of foam forty feet in height, almost blending with the black clouds that swept along above it, a roar like a battle of seventy-fours, vivid lightning and shrieking winds made up a scene of terror quite appalling.

Then all was blackness out upon the sea, and the *goleta* glided into a small basin, several acres in size, surrounded by overhanging cliffs heavily wooded, except on one side where there was a sandy beach.

"Give way hard on the port sweeps and bring her hard round! Stand by with both anchors to let fall!" shouted Ravel, and the *goleta* had hardly swept around with her head to the wind when the anchors were let go and the hurricane struck the island with a force that made it tremble.

Even where she was, the *goleta* tugged at her anchors, and the wind, dashing down over the cliff, churned the sheltered waters of the basin into foam.

The roar of the tempest without was deafening, the huge waves broke against the rock-ribbed shores without, with terrific violence.

"It is the worst hurricane I ever knew," remarked Ravel, "and if outside we would have been swamped."

"That means that the fleet are all lost?" said Felice, with tears in her large, beautiful eyes.

"Certainly, seniorita. Not a vessel in the fleet can weather this hurricane," was the answer, and Ravel turned away to make his vessel wholly secure, while Felice sought her mother in the cabin, and said, fervently:

"We must pray for their souls, mother, for they are all lost."

"No, no, not so bad as that I hope," cried Madam Chevallo.

"Yes, mother, they are lost," answered Felice, and as she uttered the words the beautiful young queen of the buccaneers dropped upon her knees and prayed for the souls of her doomed people.

The darkness of night fell upon the island from the inky clouds, and before they rolled away night itself had fallen.

All through the hours of darkness the *goleta* tugged at her anchors in a nervous way, as though knowing the fate of her sister ships, and there was little sleep on board for her crew.

At last the day dawned and the sun soon after appeared.

The storm had passed on, the heavens were cloudless, and from the shore came the songs of birds.

The basin waters were quiet, but a heavy sea yet thundered outside against the island.

A boat was lowered and a party sent ashore to reconnoiter.

They returned just as Felice and her mother came on deck after their breakfast, and reported a village of huts up the glen, with goats, wild chickens and fruit trees in abundance.

"Captain Lamonte said that this island had once been a buccaneer retreat, but fearing an attack upon them led by a former officer of their band, they had deserted the place and their vessels had been lost in just such a storm as struck our fleet yesterday."

"He and two others had alone survived, having clung to a life-boat and were cast ashore upon the Florida Coast, when he alone had the strength to swim to safety," said Ravel to Felice and her mother.

"Have you seen if any of our people were saved, Captain Ravel?" asked Felice.

"No, I had forgotten it; but really it is impossible for any to escape, though we may find some of the plunder on the rocks."

"You had forgotten to help our people, Senior Ravel?"

"This is a strange remark from you, senior," and the face of Felice flushed with anger.

"I will see what can be done at once, seniorita, and if you and madam go ashore you can select your quarters and soon make yourselves comfortable."

"We will go at once; but do you first see that there may not be some one yet alive."

"Say to the whole crew that I will give fifty pesos for every life saved, and you must put every man out on the search, for the vessel can take care of itself in this snug harbor."

Captain Ravel muttered something very like an oath, but obeyed the orders of the young queen and put his crew out on the search among the rocks.

Felice and her mother went ashore and roamed up the glen.

They found it a beautiful spot, and were not long in selecting a very comfortable cabin, built of the wreckage of ships, for their quarters.

Later the men began to return and make their report that no living person had been found, but plenty of dead bodies, with any quantities of wreckage and booty cast high up among the rocks.

Later on came Captain Ravel and he said in a tone which he had not before used in addressing Felice:

"Not a mother's son of them is alive, for men, women and children all are lost, and we found the bodies of people from each craft, which shows that all went down."

"I had the bodies stripped of their valuables and then cast back into the sea, while there is a large force of my crew gathering what plunder can be found."

"Yours and your mother's things aboard I have ordered brought ashore, Felice, for you will remain here."

"Senor Ravel, what do you mean?" sternly said Felice.

"I mean that I am master here now, fair Felice," was the rejoinder of the pirate captain.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A CAPTIVE QUEEN.

THE response of Ravel the Rover Captain fairly staggered Felice, while her mother turned pale with dread.

As for the young girl she kept her self-control and said in reply:

"If you mean what you have said as a joke, Senor Ravel, permit me to say that I do not appreciate levity at a time when we have to mourn the death of our whole band except those upon the vessel that brought us here."

"I never was more in earnest in my life, senorita, and I prove my words by saying again that there is no longer need for a queen, as the band of Lagoon Rovers have ceased to exist."

"We have now but one vessel, and her crew, excepting your mother and yourself no women, and not a child."

"I am captain of the *goleta*, and hence master here."

"I know now, senor, that you have decided to exert your rights and command your vessel; but I shall put it to the test with the crew whether they are to obey you or me."

"Do so, and you will soon discover that they follow my lead."

"I have observed of late that you were in ill humor, yet paid no attention to your words."

"Now, however, I must act."

The buccaneer laughed lightly, but at once said seriously:

"See here, Felice, I told you ten days ago that I loved you."

"I saved you from Lamonte, and I sought to prove my love in many ways."

"I saved the treasure on board the *goleta* from Lamonte's greed, and more I kept you and all from now being in an American prison."

"In return you refused my love, you have treated me with disdain and now that a happy accident has swept your power from you in the loss of your people, I tell you that I am master here, and you shall either become my wife, or you shall, after a given time, be brought to this island with your mother to spend the remainder of your life."

"Now, fair Queen Felice, who rules?"

In response Felice placed her gold whistle to her lips and blew a quick, shrill signal, the call for her people.

The signal was heard upon the schooner, and by the men already ashore, but not a man came.

Felice now turned pale, while Ravel laughed and said:

"I told you that you were no longer queen; but mark the effect of my signal."

He gave a loud call and quickly it was answered with a shout and soon after men were seen hastening toward the spot.

"Felice, the men on board the *goleta* are none of them those who followed your father's lead."

"They are nearly all new men, and they obey me, not you, for they know who it is that will protect them, who gain for them a fortune."

"See, they are coming, so give your orders."

The men rapidly came up now, and when all had assembled Felice glanced over them quietly.

She recognized the truth of the buccaneer's words, that they were comparatively new men in the band.

Madam Chevallo saw the same, and her face became the hue of death.

"My people, I called you, and you came not at my signal."

"Senor Ravel called you and you came."

"Am I to understand by this that he is to be master—I no longer to be acknowledged as your queen?"

Her words were calmly spoken, and she seemed to look every man in the eye as she uttered them.

Rollo, who had been promoted to first officer, looked over the crowd and stepped forward as spokesman.

"Senorita Chevallo, as long as the band held together as such we obeyed you as our queen."

"Now it is different, for the *goleta*, with Captain Ravel as our leader, alone remains, and it is not for us to follow a woman, for he is our chief."

There was something in the look and manner of the man Rollo as he spoke which caused Felice to gaze fixedly into his eyes.

What she read there caused her to simply bow and say:

"It was for you to say, senor, and you have spoken seemingly for all, so I abide the decision."

"Senor Captain Ravel, I will ask you to place my mother and myself on the shores of the United States whenever your vessel sails from this point."

"Men you are dismissed," said the captain, and the crew departed in silence.

Then turning to Felice Ravel remarked:

"As you have seen that I am master here, you will see that it is but for you to obey me, for I shall rule."

"I wish therefore to tell you that I give you three months from this date to decide whether you will be my wife or not, and at the end of that time, if you consent, I will land with you in an American port, make you my bride, and, with the treasure now upon this vessel and which you possess besides and which I have gained meanwhile, I will give up piracy and we will live far different lives as was your intention with Lamonte."

"If I refuse?"

"Then I shall bring you back to this island and leave you and your mother alone here while I take your treasure to go elsewhere, and enjoy it for all my own."

The answer of Felice to this was a ringing burst of laughter, which completely disconcerted the pirate captain.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

KEPT AT BAY.

THE laughter of Queen Felice completely upset the buccaneer captain, for it seemed in utter defiance to him.

Her mother also seemed at a loss to understand her mocking laughter, and Ravel said furiously:

"What are you laughing at, girl?"

"At you."

"I wish a reason for your infernal merriment."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"When you can address me with politeness, and act with respect I shall tell you, not before."

"Well, let me know if you intend to defy me?"

"In what respect?"

"Do you, or do you not intend to obey my bidding?"

"To what do you refer?"

"To become my wife?"

"I do not."

"Remember, you have three months in which to decide."

"I have already decided."

"Then you refuse?"

"Emphatically, yes."

"I shall give you the allotted time."

"See here, Ravel, I sailed here with my people to save them from prison."

"Because you had told me of Lamonte's treachery, and had not run off with the treasure of the *goleta*, I made you captain, coming here to this island to establish a home for my people."

"Then I hoped that here Lamonte would come to meet you, for I had no idea that he was dead."

"If he did not come here, then I intended to sail in the *goleta* with you in search of him."

"That was my one aim in life."

"Having captured him, and hanged him to the yard-arm, it was my intention to give to you the *goleta*, make you chief of the band, and go with my mother to seek a home where we could live with no haunting shadows upon us."

"You have deemed fit to take the reins into your own hand, to declare yourself master, and block out for me a course which I must refuse to follow at my peril."

"Now I distinctly refuse, and you will find that at the end of the three months, the time you give me in which to make up my mind, that I will gladly come here as an exile rather than become the wife of such as you."

"And your mother?"

The girl started, but Madam Chevallo came quickly to her rescue.

"I will remain with my child, be her fate what it may."

"I care not to live without her, and I will be content wherever she may be."

"Well, you shall have the three months in which to decide, and if you refuse, then here you shall both come to end your days, while I go off and enjoy your riches."

"That is what made me laugh so merrily awhile since, Ravel."

"To feel that you shall come here to die?"

"Oh, no!"

"What, then?"

"That you will go away and enjoy my pirate inheritance."

"So I said."

"I heard you."

"And so I will."

"Not you."

"What?"

"Not you."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"Pray explain what you mean."

"Simply, you will never touch a *peso* that belongs to my mother or myself."

"I certainly shall."

"No, for though it is blood-stained, though gained in a bad cause, it is my mother's and mine, and we alone shall enjoy it."

"I say no!"

"And I say yes."

"How will you get it?"

"I know that you have gold and jewels besides what there is in the secret locker in the *goleta*."

"You think so?"

"I know so, and more, I am aware that the amount is equal to what is upon the *goleta*, though this Lamonte did not even suspect."

"Well?"

"These two treasures will make me a very rich man."

"If you get them."

"There is nothing to prevent my doing so."

"Ah, yes, there is."

"What?"

"There is not a *peso* on the *goleta* except what you may have there."

"I mean in the secret lockers."

"So do I."

"There is a treasure there."

"There is not."

"Girl, do you dare tell me this?"

"Why not?"

"I shall find that locker and see for myself."

"Don't injure the *goleta* looking for the secret lockers, for I will tell you the secret of how to find them."

"Then tell me."

"The mainmast, which runs down through the cabin, a glance will show you, when you know, is much larger below decks than above. By touching a spring with your foot, and pushing hard down upon the mast with your arms encircling it, you will see the outer shell, which appeared to be the solid mast, go downward and several niches in the spar, in which were deposited gems, gold and jewelry of the greatest value."

"Now go and see if there is a *peso* there."

The man turned and fairly ran to the shore. Springing into a boat he was rowed out to the *goleta*.

A short search revealed the spring for him to put his foot on, and following the directions the young girl had given him, he soon saw the outer shell of the mast descend.

Then he beheld the niches in the solid mast, but there was not a *peso* to be found.

Wild with rage he returned to the shore, and faced the buccaneer's daughter.

She met his fierce looks smilingly, and asked:

"Did I not tell you the truth?"

"Yes, but where is that treasure?"

"With the other treasure which my mother and I separately hold."

"And where is that?" firmly said Ravel.

"Well, while the *goleta* was undergoing repairs in the lagoons I went aboard and got the treasure."

"Well?"

"I hid it away with our other valuables where you can never get it."

The buccaneer uttered an oath and with a mocking laugh the young girl continued:

"Now, Captain Ravel, I wish you would fit the *goleta* out thoroughly, which you can do here, and then sail in pursuit of Lamonte, and if you capture and hang him I'll give you just half the treasure."

"I'll do it," was the quick response, and as he turned upon his heel and walked away he muttered: "Yes, I'll hang Lamonte, my fair lady, for I am sure that he is again under the Black Flag and looking for you."

"But you shall yet be my wife and your treasure shall be mine too—I swear it!"

CHAPTER XL.

THE TWO TREASURES.

CHIEF CHEVALLO, the founder of the band of robbers who had won evil name and blood-stained fortune by their deeds of outlawry, was a saving man.

Pirate though he had become, he dearly loved his wife and daughter, and with the wish ever in his heart to some day retire from his life of crime and enjoy his riches as far as was in his power, he had saved all that he could most conveniently put away in the smallest possible space.

With due regard for the feelings of his wife and child, he had hoarded up no treasure taken from women, children or the poor.

But those who had been his prisoners who were rich, and of nationalities different from his own he had taken from, as also from Government vessels.

In this way bags of gold, some jewelry and a

great many precious gems had fallen into his hands.

Half of his savings he was wont to place in the secret treasure-coffers upon his vessel, while the other half he divided between his wife and Felice.

He had always taken particular pains to tell them that they need not refuse the gold and jewels thus given them, as they were certainly not bloodstained, though gained under the pirate flag.

Madam Chevallo was indifferent as to her share, and cast it to one side with a remark to Felice to care for it.

This Felice did, for she took pleasure in looking over the jewels, selecting what ornaments she cared to wear, and these all were secretly put away to be on hand when needed, for the young pirate queen always had the belief that the jewels would some day come into better use than lying in hiding among the forests of the Gulf shores.

Even her mother did not know the hiding-place chosen for them.

Whether there was a lingering dread of Ravel in her heart or not, I do not know, and she herself may not have been conscious of the fact; but certain it was that she decided not to trust the treasure with her upon the sail of the *goleta* to the new retreat among the Bahamas.

The more she thought it over the more convinced she became that it was best to hide the treasure in the old retreat, or rather leave it in its hiding-place undisturbed.

Her mother was so indifferent regarding it all that she said nothing to her about taking or leaving the treasure, and then it came to her mind that it would be as well to remove the valuables from the secret coffers of the *goleta*, or rather to see if they were there.

So she went aboard at night, and, acquainted with the secret receptacle and having been taught how to open it by her father, Felice soon discovered that the riches were as they had been left by Chief Chevallo.

She was successful in removing them from the secret coffers unseen, and they were given a resting-place along with the riches which her mother and herself had hidden away.

If misfortune befell the fleet, if it was captured, then she would still know where to find her wealth, and the thought was a pleasing one to the young Sea Robber Queen.

The fact must be told that Felice was decided in her own mind that Lamonte was not dead.

It did not seem to her that he could thus pass away after all his crimes, after his conduct toward her.

She would meet him again, and she had determined that it should be so.

Once they had found a new retreat, she would go on the search for the runaway pirate captain, and find him.

She would sail the seas over, and when she had found Lamonte, cruel indeed would his punishment be at her hands.

Every atom of love for him, intense as it had been, had turned to a hatred even more intense.

She would not be a pirate, but a pirate-hunter, for of course Lamonte would become once more a free rover, and such a man could not be long without an armed deck and lawless crew under his command, she was well assured.

She meant to pay her crew out of her own fortune, while Ravel could be captain of the band and cruise for the riches of the people.

Once she had avenged herself, by bringing Lamonte to the yard-arm, then she would be content to live for her mother far from scenes that would remind her of a past only full of the cruellest memories to her.

Such was the plan of Felice, and she kept it to herself.

But upon the cruise of the fleet toward the Bahama retreat, she had observed a change in the manner of Ravel toward her.

He was becoming bolder in his manner, and his look, as his eyes met hers, she did not like.

She feared that he was plotting to one day rule the band and its queen.

Her fears proved correct when one day he told her of his love for her and asked her to become his wife in the future.

She refused his love, for she held love for no man after her heart-sufferings through Lamonte's deeds.

Ravel appeared to accept the situation, and yet Felice felt that it was for the present only.

Then came the wrecking of the little fleet which left her mother and herself at the mercy of the ambitious young captain.

How glad Felice was then that she had left the treasure behind.

This proved her safeguard, for Ravel, with all his love for her, was even more fond of gold.

He would not dare put her to death, or drive her to take her own life, for with her must perish the secret of where the treasure was hidden, and now he knew that it was an enormous fortune, combined, as was what she and her brother had possessed, with what had been on the *goleta*, in its secret lockers, and the hopes of the young captain exaggerated the amount of both.

So, content with being master, he yet must

feel that Felice held the winning hand and he was at her mercy in one sense of the word.

So he set to work to chime in with her humor of finding out what had become of Lamonte.

If he did capture Lamonte, and hang him, as he was very certain to do, then by the pledge of Felice he would get one-half the treasure.

To get it he must go where it was, and ever treacherous he meant to have all, and more too, that he would force the young pirate queen to become his wife.

So decided Ravel, and until he had all his own way he yielded in a measure to Felice, fitted the vessel out for her special cruise after Lamonte and meanwhile gave her a limit in which to decide whether she would accept him as a lover.

CHAPTER XL.

THE STRANGE SAIL.

AFTER a month spent at the island retreat the *goleta* sailed away, in pursuit of prizes, as good as a new vessel.

The spars of the wrecked vessels, with new canvas brought on the *goleta*, a perfect repairing and paint had made the craft as good as she ever had been, while her increased sail area perceptibly added to her speed.

Her guns were in perfect condition and her crew of eighty men had been thoroughly drilled under their best captain.

Determined to make the island his retreat, the buccaneer had left there the booty gathered from the shore and half a dozen sick men of the crew.

He had desired Felice and her mother also to remain, but they had insisted upon accompanying him to sea, and fearing that a vessel might appear off the island and they signal it to take them off, he decided that it was best to have them go.

So the Lady Lawless sailed from the island the pride of her captain and crew.

Her first prize was a Cuban coaster, and although she had little of value on board, Ravel learned from her skipper that she had been chased off her course by Lamonte the Rover, but had eluded him in the darkness and storm which was then raging.

"You say that you were chased by Lamonte the Rover?"

"Yes, senor."

"How do you know?"

"I know him and I recognized him with my glass."

"Nonsense!"

"I was his prisoner, senor, but a few weeks before, but escaped along with a lot of others he sent on board a prize."

"And you are sure that it was Lamonte?"

"He called himself Lamonte, Senor Pirate."

"Describe his vessel."

"A lateen rig like your vessel, only larger, with three guns to a broadside, and three pivots."

"And his flag?"

"Was a black field with a red arrow in the center of it."

"Describe the man."

The coaster did so and Ravel said:

"You are right, it was Lamonte."

"It certainly can be no other," said Felice who had overheard all that the coaster's captain had said:

"Then he surely is afloat again, Ravel."

"Yes, senorita."

"Well, you know the reward I offer."

"I shall win it, senorita."

"See that you do."

"And within another month I shall win my bride," was the sinister reply.

Felice was about to make some retort when from aloft came the cry:

"Sail ho!"

"Ay, ay, whereaway?"

"A brig, senor, standing east by north as though to round Florida."

"Ay, ay, I see her now, for the mist shut her out from sight before."

As the coaster was of no value, and he was glad to have heard from him that Lamonte was again at sea and in his old vessel, the captured Red Arrow, Ravel gave orders to square away in chase of the stranger.

There had been a mist to leeward and this had shut the strange sail from view, for it was now not over two leagues distant.

After examining her attentively with his glass Ravel said:

"Senor Rollo, she is a brig, and a very trim built craft, so must be an American."

"I can not tell yet whether she is armed, but think not, and she does not seem yet to have discovered us."

"No, senor, she holds quietly on her way, and if she is an American she is doubtless richly freighted."

"Yes—ah! she sees us now and is crowding on sail; but we will show her what the *goleta* can do when it comes to a chase."

Orders were given then to crowd sail on the *goleta* and heeling gracefully to the pressure of canvas, for a ten-knot breeze was blowing, she cut her way rapidly through the waters.

The chase was now not over four miles away and was, as Captain Ravel had said, a trim-

built and rigged craft which had the appearance of being speedy.

At first she seemed to almost hold her own with the pirate, but then the latter soon began to gain and the brig crowded on every stitch of canvas that would draw.

Still the *goleta* crept nearer and nearer, and it only became a question of time as to when she would overtake the strange sail, unless darkness or a storm would enable her to dodge her.

But night was yet several hours off, and by the time it came the *goleta* promised to draw near enough not to be eluded afterward, even if a gale should spring up.

That the brig was a merchant vessel could now be plainly seen, and she was undoubtedly aware of the character of her pursuer, for she was making superhuman efforts to escape.

Those on the *goleta* could see the score of men visible upon the strange sail throwing water upon the sails, trimming ship, and seeming to try a dozen different ways of adding to their speed.

But in vain, for the buccaneer was swiftly and surely gaining upon her prey.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE VAGABOND CAPTAIN.

NOT for an instant did Martil Juarez, the man who had dropped from rank and honor, to a vagabond sailor, suspect the inner life of Banker Escalon.

He saw only in that man the life of seeming honor that he led.

His double life he knew not of any more than did he suspect Henrico Valverde of being the noted mountain robber chief he in reality was.

He received his vessel as has been seen, and anxious to show that his life had thoroughly changed, he devoted himself, day and night, to his work in hand.

Though told by Banker Escalon to spare no expense, he yet did so wherever opportunity offered, and this his employer knew well, for of course he had spies upon the young sailor.

The more he tried to catch him in some act of trickery, and failed, the more he was pleased with Martil Juarez, and congratulated himself over and over again upon having found such a splendid specimen of a man.

A man whom he had taken by the hand and raised from the gutter, when every one else had given him a kick to carry him further down on his evil course.

At last the brig was in the trim which Captain Martil Juarez wished, and she set sail, as has been seen.

Juarez had selected his men well, and he had picked the officers from among them, knowing well his material.

He had given the crew to understand, the moment that the Castle San Juan d'Uloa was left astern, that the brig was bound on no peaceful cruise.

He also gave the more reckless ones to comprehend that she was not to be turned into a pirate.

He told them that the boxes containing supposed rich freight, held small-arms and ammunition, and then added:

"My men, we are on a cruise for fame, and it will bring us honor as well, and riches too."

"Our land of Mexico has few vessels to protect her commerce upon the high seas, and we are consequently preyed upon by lawless rovers."

"The Government being poor asked the aid of a rich and noble Mexican, who responded promptly and bought this vessel."

"The Government had no armed cruiser to send upon the special mission upon which we go, so I volunteered to captain an armed craft."

"We have a fleet vessel here, a stanch one too, and though we could not hope to overhaul in fair chase a fleet sea rover, we can capture one by a ruse."

"I let it be suspected in Vera Cruz that we were to carry a rich cargo to New York, so that the pirates will be after us, you may rest assured."

"And they must catch us too."

"But when, after a chase, they do board the brig Surprise, we must turn the tables upon them and prove the captors."

"We must be the ones to take the prize."

"You all know that a once distinguished and respected officer of the army, was given a vessel in the navy of Mexico, and that he betrayed his trust and turned her into a pirate."

"That officer is Captain Almo Urhuna of the brig Relentless, a fleet and well-armed craft, and I only hope she will be the one to try and make a prize of the Surprise."

"If she is first met with, our duty is to capture her."

"Then Lamonte the Rover is to be our game, with other sea robbers who sail under the black flag."

"Men, I have taken you into my confidence, I have selected you knowing your skill as seamen, your worth as brave men, and I rely upon you to obey my orders, and I tell you that we are protected by the Mexican Government."

"Now go to your posts and know that when I call upon you I expect every man to do his duty promptly, and the man who skulks I shall shoot down as I would a foe."

This ringing speech of the young captain made its mark at once.

It was received with ringing cheers, and the men were happy in being taken into the confidence of their commander, and, picked out by him for the cruise, were in good humor and felt the utmost respect and trust in him.

Sailing under such favorable auspices, the Surprise could not hope otherwise than for a most successful cruise.

Disciplining and training his crew kept Martil Juarez busy for a few days, and then he felt that he was prepared to meet a foe, and even a very formidable one, for his being a *decoy* would be half the battle in the surprise he would give an enemy.

When the lookout announced a sail that was likely to prove far different material from the vessels lately met with, and which were only merchantmen, the captain took his glass and went up into the rigging to where he could obtain a good look at the stranger.

"A lateen rig, and from her build armed, of course."

"A Spanish cruiser, or a pirate."

"She has a familiar look to me somehow, yet I cannot place her."

"I will stand on until I get a better view, and then run for it."

"He will follow, of course, so I will have a chance of testing his speed, for I know well what my craft will do."

So saying Juarez descended to the deck and reported his observations to his three officers.

It was not very long after before the stranger was made out to be a large armed *goleta*, and she put away in chase of the brig like one who expected to capture a valuable prize.

For a mile or more Juarez felt of the speed of the stranger, and finding him to be gaining, every stitch of canvas that would draw a capful of wind was set.

Under its pressure the Surprise seemed at first to almost hold her own.

But the *goleta* set a trifle more canvas, seemed to "trim ship" and dampen the sails she had up, and soon began to walk up at a lively pace.

Still the Surprise was not an easy vessel to overhaul, and she began to hold her own once more, until Captain Juarez, fearing the *goleta* might give up the chase, ordered drags out over the bows to deaden her headway, for, watched as he was, he dare not pay out a cable astern that might be seen.

The result of the drag was that the *goleta's* commander must no longer feel any doubt as to his capturing the prize he was in chase of.

CHAPTER XLIII.

SECRETLY A FRIEND.

MUCH has been said of the strange man Rollo, who was known among the crew as "The Chaplain" on account of his sad face and serious manners.

That he had known better days was evident, for he was well informed upon almost all subjects, while he was also a skillful seaman.

He was one who had indeed been forced into piracy, and his only reason for not escaping was Felice.

He had quickly analyzed her character, now that at heart she was pure, and only a cruel fate had made her what she was.

He knew, too, the history of her mother, and had listened to the tales of how Chevallo had loved her alone and had been devotedly loved in return by his beautiful wife.

The more he thought over the desolate situation of Felice the more he became interested in her and determined not to desert her.

He knew how false-hearted was Captain Lamonte, and he knew also that Ravel was no better and it would be a cruel future for Felice to ally herself to either.

He had saved Ravel from the mutineers, and when he saw what the fate of Felice promised to be he felt almost sorry that he had not let them kill the pirate officer.

He could see then how he could have played a bold game, gotten the *goleta* and made known to the Buccaneer Queen just what had occurred.

Had he done so, he would then have been in command, with the difference that he meant well by Felice, which was not the case with Ravel, as he well knew.

To save her from him then was his determination.

Ravel had made him first officer of the schooner, so that gave him considerable power.

The loss of the fleet Rollo had deplored, for among her people Felice had been perfectly safe.

Ravel dared not put his will against the young queen's while her outlaw band was under her control.

But with the fleet wrecked Ravel had at once shown the cloven foot, and Rollo felt that the position of the young girl was pitiable.

He would not say aught to defend her, but he made up his mind that he would protect her if his life was the forfeit.

When the allotted time was up, which the young outlaw captain had given Felice to decide in, Rollo decided to act and with promptness.

He had given Felice a look which he had meant

she should understand, and feel that he at least was her friend.

She did understand it, and yet, watching the man afterward most closely she could get from him no other sign.

The day before the sailing of the *goleta* from the Bahama retreat, Felice strolled up to the cliff for a lookout over the sea, as was her wont.

She found there Officer Rollo, glass in hand, sweeping the seas.

"Any sail in sight, senor?" she asked, glancing about to see if any one else was present.

"No, Queen Felice, and I am glad you have come."

"I thought I saw a sail from below, so came to look, as only an armed craft, a cruiser in fact, or a pirate seeking to hide plunder would come into these waters."

"And why should a cruiser come here, Officer Rollo?"

"Searching for pirates, senorita."

"Ah! then you were afraid a cruiser might find us?"

"I was afraid it might *not* find us, senorita."

"This sounds like a treacherous speech, senor."

"It is, and you know I am no pirate at heart, Queen Felice."

"I am here now because I hated to leave one so pure and good as you are among a lot of ravaging wolves."

"Ravel loves you, yet such love as he holds is far worse than hatred, as you will find unless I can save you from him."

"You can save me, Senor Rollo?"

"You understood my look the day we came, senorita?"

"It meant that I was not friendless."

"Yes, it was for you to obey Ravel, and trust in what might come up in the future."

"He has his men under his command, with perhaps a few men whom I can sway."

"But he shall do you no harm, for I am determined on it, if I have to become a mutineer and seize the vessel."

"I will not see you harmed, you or your mother, and robbed of your inheritance, for I will protect you."

"The moment that Ravel goes beyond certain bounds I shall act, and promptly, and I become master of the vessel."

"And should it come to this?" asked Felice, deeply moved by the manner and words of the strange man.

"I shall at once head for the nearest American seaport, dismiss the crew, send you and your mother to a place of safety, and turn the vessel over to the authorities as just what she is, a pirate craft."

"You have planned boldly, Officer Rollo."

"I have planned to save you, Senorita Felice, and I bid you now rest with an easy mind, for you are not to be harmed."

"I thank you, and I appreciate what you would do for me, Officer Rollo; but there is one thing I would ask you."

"I am at your service, Queen Felice."

"Should it come to a mutiny?"

"To protect you, remember, senorita."

"Yes, but should it come to a mutiny, and you become the master of this vessel, you have said what you would do?"

"Yes, queen."

"Should there be no mutiny?"

"Then I would try to urge the escape of your mother and yourself with me."

"Good! but in case you become master, there is one thing I wish you to do for me."

"Name it, queen."

"You have my word to pledge the crew, as a means to have them side with you, half the treasure that was in the secret lockers on board the *goleta*."

"Yes, lady."

"And then you are to go on a cruise in the *goleta*?"

"A cruise, lady?"

"Yes; but not a piratical voyage."

"Yes."

"You are to hunt down for me Lamonte."

"Ah! I will pledge myself to the task, queen."

"And then you will have his vessel to surrender to the American Government as well as this, with the credit of having hanged Lamonte."

"I understand, and give you the promise, Queen Felice," was the earnest response of Officer Rollo, and the young girl was elated at having in the man a devoted, though secret, friend.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DECOY.

"WE have a valuable prize in yonder craft, Senor Rollo."

"So I think, senor," responded Rollo.

It was just sunset, and the strange sail was not now two miles away, and in half an hour more, by the time it was fully dark, she would be within fair range of the pivot-gun mounted forward on the *goleta*.

The brig still held on in the flight, however, using every effort to escape, and yet those on board must have felt that their relentless pursuer was not to be thrown off their course.

Felice and her mother were both on deck,

watching the chase with considerable interest, and each hoping that the brig would escape.

As the daylight yet lingered, Ravel said:

"Senor Rollo, throw a shot over him from the bow gun, run up the sable flag, and let him see who it is after him, if he has not already guessed."

"Ay, ay, senor," and Rollo gave the orders.

A moment after the bow pivot burst forth in flame and sent a solid shot far over the stranger.

As the gun was fired the black flag of the pirate was run up.

Up to the peak of the brig fluttered a flag, and there was still light enough to see that it was the Stars and Stripes of the United States.

"Hah! I told you we would get a rich prize."

"Now, senorita, you will have a chance to add to your wealth," said the buccaneer captain.

"In what way, Senor Ravel?" coldly asked Felice.

"My wealth will be yours, and I expect to get a rich haul from yonder brig."

"She is an American, I see."

"Yes, and as she does not halt at my fire, it proves she has a cargo worth saving."

"Try another shot, Senor Rollo."

Another shot was fired, but still the brig held on.

It was now too dark to see if she still kept her colors up, but certain it was that she still held on.

Then as a third shot flew over her, she changed her course suddenly, and it was supposed she meant to come to.

But instead she darted away upon another point of sailing as though to risk the fire, and see if she could not outfoot her pursuer with the wind astern.

But the *goleta* hung on like the bloodhound she was, and still she gained upon the chase.

Again and again the brig tried to dodge the buccaneer, but all to no use, for he would not be thrown off, and followed as steadily as before.

A mile now divided the two, and the buccaneer fired slowly and steadily, but without apparent damage.

The brig risked the fire, and held on her way in silence.

After three bells had struck, the brig was but a quarter of a mile away.

The *goleta* had steadily gained, and as steadily fired, but the brig would not halt in her flight.

She had been hit, and often, yet she would not come to.

"Another half-hour will decide it," gleefully said Ravel.

Then Officer Rollo asked if it would not be well to pour a broadside upon the brig and settle it at once.

"Yes, I'll do it," was the answer, and the order was given to clear the starboard guns, the three pivots, intending to fire with the starboard battery.

As the *goleta* began to sweep around, those on the fugitive brig seemed to realize her intention and instantly she swept up into the wind and lay motionless upon the waters as token of her surrender.

The breeze was not as fresh as it had been before sunset, and the *goleta*, reducing sail as she bowed along, went at a six-knot pace to pick up the game she had flushed.

As she drew nearer she could see that the brig was lying to with her crew gathered upon the bulwarks as though watching with interest her buccaneer captor.

Drawing within hail Ravel called out:

"Ho the brig aboy."

"Ho the buccaneer!" came in a hoarse, sullen voice.

"What brig is that?"

"The American brig Surprise, from Vera Cruz to New York."

"What is your cargo?"

"We have a very valuable cargo on board for which we are willing to pay ransom so that we can go on our way."

"I'll see about that."

"What craft is that?"

"The buccaneer craft Lady Lawless, Captain Ravel, and you are my prize," was the sharp reply and in another instant the outlaw vessel had glided slowly alongside of the brig.

"Captain Ravel demands your complete surrender, or no mercy shown!" cried Ravel himself, as the grapnels were cast, and he sprung upon the brig's deck, followed only by a handful of men.

"Surrender yourself, Sir Pirate, or no mercy shown!" came in a voice that rung like a bugle, and a volley of musketry from the brig swept the decks of every pirate who had sprung on board.

"Boarders ahoy! follow me!"

"The ship is ours!" came in the same ringing voice, and a man in uniform leaped upon the Lady Lawless, while at his back came a swarm of men, coming from the cabin, hatches and a dozen places of hiding.

"Sweep the pirates into the sea!" yelled the leader of the brig's crew and he called out again:

"You have caught a decoy, my red-handed buccaneers, for this craft holds a commission to hang all ocean outlaws!"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE VAGABOND SAILOR WINS HIS SHIP.

WHEN Captain Ravel boarded the brig, which he had fondly hoped was to prove so rich a prize, the fact that he had caught a tartar never entered his mind until he found himself confronted by a man in uniform and heard his clarion tones to surrender.

The men at his back seemed dazed at their situation, for they beheld forms by the score rising up on all sides, and then came the fatal volley.

With a groan of anguish and rage commingled, Ravel the Rover went to the deck, while over his fallen form bounded the leader of the brig's boarders who at once gained a footing upon the *goleta* and confronted the surprised pirates.

Upon the quarter-deck stood Rollo, and near him was Felice, while Madam Chevallo was in the cabin.

Instantly Rollo realized the situation and knew that the *goleta* was to be the scene of a desperate hand-to-hand conflict.

Seizing Felice about the waist he bounded down the companionway with her and placed her by her mother's side in the cabin.

"You must remain here, for the *goleta* is lost," he said quickly.

"Then the brig is an armed cruiser?"

"No, not armed, but manned, and she has force enough to take the *goleta*, for our men are panic-stricken," was the answer.

"And you?"

"I have told you before that I was a pirate only from necessity, that I remained such to be near you."

"I will not fight now for a black flag, and I will protect you with my life, as I meant to do, had Ravel attempted to carry out his threat against you."

"And Ravel?"

"He fell at the volley fired on board the brig, and if he is dead he has escaped the gallows—hark!"

"How desperately they are fighting!" cried Madam Chevallo.

"The *goleta's* crew are fighting with a noose about their necks."

"I will go on deck and watch the combat."

"Stay! you may be killed."

"If so, I will but meet my fate which I cannot avoid."

"If I fall, remember that I love you and would have gladly given my life to save you."

With this Rollo left the cabin and went on deck.

The scene that met his gaze was a thrilling one, for the *goleta* was a mass of struggling men.

The buccaneers fully equaled their foes when the combat began, but their captain lay wounded upon the brig with half a dozen of his men dead about him.

Then the first rush of the brig's crew, led by their daring officer had cut down many more, while, at first seized with panic at their surprise they hardly offered resistance.

Then First Officer Rollo was not there to step into the place of their captain, and the buccaneers did not gain their presence of mind until they felt themselves being beaten into the sea.

Then they rallied and a fierce fight began.

But the brig's crew were not to be checked in their advance, while their brave leader rushed on at their head and the buccaneers then saw that all was lost.

As the first cries for mercy arose, Rollo, standing with folded arms near the companionway, his eyes taking in the scene of carnage, felt a stinging blow in the breast.

With a moan he sunk to the deck, half arose and fell back again just as the brig's commander came aft, for the victory was won.

"Hal! senor, you are hard hit, I see," said the brig's captain, bending over the wounded man.

"Yes, though I took no part in the fight, as I have been forced into piracy, and made an officer on board the vessel."

"What craft is it?"

"The Lady Lawless, commanded by Ravel the Rover."

"Ah! Chevallo's old vessel and a good one."

"Chevallo is dead."

"So I heard long ago; but where is Ravel, who I learn is captain here?"

"Dead upon your deck, for it was he who led the boarders."

"What is your vessel?"

"The unarmed Mexican brig Surprise, out on a cruise as a decoy to do just what she has done to-night, capture a fleet armed craft."

"You have one."

"I know it, for my brig is fast and this *goleta* easily overhauled her."

"But I feel sorry for you, my man."

"Never mind your sympathy for me, for I accept what Fate has given me."

"But there are ladies on board this vessel."

"Hal! captives?"

"Yes."

"They shall be at once cared for and relieved from their anxiety."

"Will you have me borne into the cabin, for I am dying, and unable to move?"

"Certainly! here, lads, four of you bear this man into the cabin—easy, for he has his death-wound!"

The men lifted the form up gently, and a moment after it was laid upon the cabin floor at the feet of Felice.

"Ah! it is you, Senor Rollo!"

"How I feel for you, for you have been most kind to my mother and I," and Felice knelt down and took the hand of the dying man.

"He tells me, senorita, that he has been a pirate from being forced to serve, and that you were Ravel's captives."

The stern, deep voice of the speaker caused Felice to start and look up into his face.

The man stepped backward in amazement as the beautiful eyes met his, and a vision of loveliness such as he had never dreamed of was before him.

"He was a pirate, senor, from force, as my mother and myself know, for he was compelled to serve in our band by Lamonte, who succeeded my father in command of the Lagoon Rovers."

The words fell with startling distinctness upon the ears of the brig's commander, and he said, almost in a tone of horror:

"In your band? Succeeded your father?"

"Yes, senor, for you speak to the daughter of the late Buccaneer Chief Chevallo, and I was known as the Queen of the Rovers of the Lagoons!" said Felice, calmly.

"My God! You a pirate's daughter?"

"Yes, senor."

"No mortal lips but your own could have ever made me believe so, senorita."

"It is true, nevertheless, senor, and this lady is my mother, Madam Chevallo."

The young captain bowed low, as though to one of exalted rank, while Felice asked in her quiet way, for she was perfectly calm now:

"May I ask, senor, who is the captor of this vessel?"

"My name is Martil Juarez, senorita, and I hold a Letter of Marque from the Junta of Mexico," was the reply of the captor of the *goleta*.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE MEXICAN'S VOW.

THE young Mexican commander of the brig seemed to be deeply impressed with the discovery he had made in regard to Felice and her mother.

There before him was a beautiful girl, with a face as innocent as an angel's, and she boldly proclaimed herself a pirate's daughter.

And there, too, was a woman of refinement, with a sad, lovely face, whom she called mother.

He had often heard of Chevallo as a most chivalrous outlaw, and also that he carried with him upon his vessel his wife, who was said to be young and beautiful.

Now he came face to face with the fact that he had the buccaneer queen a captive.

He was in a quandary, for the face of the maiden had completely won him at a glance.

"Senor!"

"Yes," and the officer turned to the man lying upon the cabin floor, and who had been a close observer of all that had taken place.

"Remember, senor, you have a mother, mayhap sisters, and you would feel kindly toward one who had them kindly treated if they were placed as these two are."

"My dear senor, these ladies shall only meet with the kindest treatment at my hands," said Juarez, quickly.

"Yes, your face tells that; but why let any of your crew know that they are connected with the outlaws?"

"Let them be considered Ravel's captives, as I told you they were."

"Hal! you are right."

"Yes, senor, the stain would be upon them wherever they go, no matter how innocent they may be, if it was known that they were the wife and daughter of a buccaneer."

"When the prisoners are removed from the deck let these ladies, I beseech you, be taken to your cabin on the brig, as captives rescued from Ravel the Rover."

"No, no, I ask nothing, my mother asks nothing of you, senor, and we accept all that fate may have in store for us," said Felice, quickly.

But Juarez replied:

"It shall be as this poor man requests, senorita."

Then he left the cabin of the *goleta* and returned after half an hour.

"Senorita, I am ready to conduct your mother and yourself to my brig," he said, politely.

Felice had been kneeling by the form of Rollo, and said, quickly:

"He is dying, senor, and I would remain with him until the end."

"He shall be removed also to my cabin, senorita; but now you and your mother come with me please."

His manner was gentle, yet firm, and they obeyed.

Upon reaching the deck they saw the result of the battle.

The deck of the *goleta* was a sad picture indeed; but the crew of the vessel, excepting the dead, were nowhere to be seen.

The men of the brig were busy in looking af-

ter their own wounded and clearing the decks, the prisoners having all been removed and put in irons.

The brig's commander led the way to his own cabin and bade the mother and daughter be comfortable there.

"And poor Rollo?" asked Felice.

"Shall soon be sent here to you, senorita," was the reply.

Then he returned to the *goleta's* cabin.

Rollo lay there quietly, his eyes roving about as though anxious to take a parting look at all around him.

"My poor fellow, I wish I could help you, but I have seen enough of wounds to know that yours is fatal, and may Heaven help you," and Captain Juarez took a seat by the dying man.

"Senor, I have strength to tell you of that young girl and her mother, so let me do so."

"Certainly, for I came to ask you of them."

"I am a pirate, senor, but I became one from force of circumstances, to save my life when captured."

"I met the Senorita Chevallo, and I have never had the will to escape when it was in my power, for I loved her though I knew my affection was never returned."

"I ran away from home when a boy, and going back a few years ago I found all gone, so I have no one to mourn for me in all this world."

"But let me tell you of Senorita Felice, and then you will know her as she is, as she has been, our queen."

And so Rollo went on to tell the story of Chief Chevallo's life and how nobly Madam Chevallo had clung to him through all.

He told of Felice's being sent to New Orleans to a boarding school, and that no shadow of wrong had ever fallen upon her young life other than that she was a pirate's daughter.

The story of Lamonte's influence over the chief, and the pledge of the man to make Felice his wife after a given time, and to break up the band, living a different life, was all told, and Rollo added:

"The girl never loved him, she was only fascinated with him."

Then followed the story of Lamonte's treachery, and of Ravel's becoming captain.

The loss of the lagoon fleet, the treachery of Ravel, and the threat of the Rover was made known, Captain Juarez listening with the deepest attention, and asking questions here and there as the story was told.

At last Rollo said:

"Now, Senor Captain, you can understand why I wish you to let the unfortunate mother and daughter be looked upon before the world as captives, no one knowing their past."

"Ravel is dead, the Lagoon Rovers almost wiped out, and you can readily keep this secret!"

"Lamonte still flies his black flag, and the senorita has vowed to be avenged upon him, and she will be content with your pledge to hunt him down, while, to capture him will be honor enough for you."

"I cannot last very long, so let me tell you now that to the victor belong the spoils it is said, and about my waist is a belt—take it now, please."

The Mexican obeyed and Rollo continued:

"Now, senor, I give it to you, excepting one ring in there, which I beg you to give to Senorita Felice after I am dead, and ask her to wear it in memory of me—nay, senor, you must not refuse my gift, and your men will get their prize in the *goleta*, while there is considerable booty at the island rendezvous, and you will find the chart of it, and how to run into the basin, in Ravel's desk there."

"Senor, accept my gift I beg of you, for it only amounts to a couple of thousand pesos, and naval officers are not always rich—the ring though, give to Senorita Felice after I am dead."

"I will do so, my poor friend, and could you but live I would make you an officer upon my vessel; but now let me remove you to the brig's cabin, and I vow to you, solemnly, that I will protect those two ladies as though they were my own mother and sister."

"God bless you, senor," fervently said Rollo, and then calling to some of his men Captain Juarez had the wounded man borne to the cabin of the brig.

Two hours after when he entered the cabin again, Captain Juarez found that Rollo was dead.

"Senorita, from his lips I heard the story of your mother's and your life."

"He begged me after he was dead, to ask you to wear this ring in memory of him."

"May I place it upon your finger?"

"Yes, senor, there to remain, I pledge you, for his was a noble heart," said Rachel with emotion.

"And, senorita, let me pledge to you and to your mother, my sincere friendship, and the assurance that no one shall know that you were other than Ravel's captives."

"I will land you, when I can do so, at an American port, and then I have a duty to perform, for I am pledged to hunt down Lamonte, the Buccaneer."

"Ah, senor, if you will bring that man to the gallows you will be the friend of humanity," cried Madam Chevallo, while Rachel remained silent.

"It is the duty I have set myself to perform, senora, and I have registered a vow to hang him," was the response of Mantil Juarez.

Soon after the two vessels headed for the island retreat in the Bahamas.

CHAPTER XLVII.

DEAD OR ALIVE.

MARTIL JAUREZ had proven himself equal to the occasion, when it presented itself, and the crew of his vessel were delighted with their young commander and his success.

He had carried out his intention of securing a fleet, sound vessel, and he had gotten a good craft, ridding the sea of a pirate in doing so.

Then, too, he had led his crew, and this added to his popularity.

His ruse to protect the two women, or rather the carrying out of Rollo's ruse, was also successful, for all of his men believed them to have been Ravel's captives.

They were treated with marked respect, and Rollo was deemed to have been also a captive.

When Rollo died he would have been consigned to the sea with the others, but suddenly Felice appeared upon deck and going up to Captain Juarez, said in a low, pathetic tone:

"Senor, you will give him at least Christian burial?"

The young captain started, and said:

"You refer of course to Senor Rollo?"

"Yes, Senor Captain, and I beg of you not to bury him as you do the others without a word of prayer."

"Senorita, I must confess that my lips have for so long been strangers to prayer that I remember nothing of the service for the dead."

"I know it all, so will you permit me to recite it over his body, for he was, oh! so kind to me?"

"You shall have your wish, senorita, and I shall at once give the necessary orders."

Felice turned away and went down to the cabin and joined her mother.

"He is a good man, mother, for he says I may recite the prayers for the dead over poor Rollo."

"He is indeed good, and be Rollo what he may, the prayers for the dead from your lips, my child, may atone for his crimes," was Madam Chevallo's response.

This act of the young Pirate Queen had deeply touched Martil Juarez.

It told him that the heart of the young girl was, as Rollo had said, true as steel and pure.

His men believing Rollo to have been a captive would think nothing of his being given the service of the dead, while the pirates were all in irons below deck, though Captain Juarez intended, as soon as he had gotten rid of his fair passengers, to make terms with Ravel's men for service with him, a thing which he felt assured they would be only too glad to do.

So the body of Rollo was carefully sewn up in a hammock, with a heavy cannon ball made fast to the feet, and the crew were mustered for burial at sea just at sunset.

The brig and *goleta* had been going along since getting under way at a fair rate of speed, their destination being the secret retreat on the island of the Bahamas, the chart of which Captain Juarez determined to most carefully study.

"All is in readiness, senorita," said Captain Juarez, entering the cabin and offering his arm to Felice.

She bowed, and resting her hand lightly upon his arm accompanied him from the cabin, her mother following slowly.

The crew had been mustered and stood at respectful attention, while the vessel had been brought to and lay idly rolling upon the sea with the *goleta* lying to also a cable's length away.

There upon the deck lay the form of the dead Rollo, and forward were the other dead, for none had been yet buried, Captain Juarez intending to pitch them overboard after night-fall, excepting the slain of his own crew, which had also been sewn up in hammocks, shotted and prepared for burial in the ocean.

"There lie my own slain, also, senorita, and I would thank you if you would also recite the burial service over them."

"It will please my crew, too."

"I will do as you wish, of course, Captain Juarez," was the ready reply of the young girl.

Then she stepped forward, to the side of the canvas-wrapped body, and in a voice that was clear and firm, repeated the service for the dead.

With a splash the body went downward to its last resting-place in the sea, and Rollo the Sailor was forever at rest.

The service was then recited by Felice over the dead of the Mexican crew, and they too sunk beneath the waves.

"Have you seen him?" whispered Madam Chevallo.

"You mean Ravel, mother?"

"Yes."

"No."

"Are you sure that he is dead?"

"Rollo said that he had fallen with his death-wound."

"Why not ask Captain Juarez?"

"I will," and Felice asked the young Mexican:

"Where is the body of Captain Ravel, senor?"

"Among the buccaneer dead, senorita."

"You saw him?"

"Not after he fell."

"You are sure he was killed?"

"Well, yes, I feel pretty sure."

"Yet he might have escaped."

"How could he, senorita?"

"I see no plan now, Captain Juarez, and yet he is no ordinary man."

"Well, I feel confident he is dead, yet I dislike that you should feel any doubt upon the subject, so do you mind going in a boat to the *goleta*, and seeing for yourself?"

"I will go," firmly responded the maiden, and a boat was lowered and she entered it with Captain Juarez, and they were pulled over to the *goleta*, which had been signaled to come to, for the two vessels were again under way.

There was a prize-crew from the brig on board, under a young Mexican officer, who greeted them at the gangway.

"You have buried no dead, Castellar?" said Juarez, addressing the young officer.

"No, senor, I obeyed your orders to wait until night."

"And the captain of the *goleta*?"

"Is with the dead, yonder, senor, under that sail."

"Have them placed in a row, faces up, so that this lady can see them."

The order was obeyed, and Felice went along, viewing each face.

There were over a score of them, but Felice cried, excitedly:

"He is not here, senor."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A MYSTERIOUS ESCAPE.

"He is not there!" cried Captain Juarez, when Felice the Rover Queen had made the startling announcement that the body of Ravel the Buccaneer was not among the dead bodies lying upon the deck of the *goleta*.

"No, Senor Captain, the body of Captain Ravel is not here," was the firm response.

"But, senorita, may you not be mistaken?"

"I could not be."

"These are the only dead on the vessel."

"There are some on the brig?"

"Yes, my own dead were there, and you were good enough to recite the burial prayers over them."

"Then his body was among them, senor."

"No, for only the men I lost were there."

"Might there not have been a miscount made?"

"No, senorita, I saw them myself, and the dead of my vessel alone were there."

"Then he is among the wounded."

"Ah! that may be, and I shall at once find out."

"Senor Castellar?"

"Yes, Captain Juarez."

"See if Captain Ravel the Rover is among the wounded on the *goleta*."

"He is not, sir."

"Be good enough to see."

The officer disappeared, but returned after a short while with the report that Ravel was not among the wounded.

"Have you buried any of the bodies, Castellar?"

"Not one, Senor Captain."

"This is strange."

"I will hail the brig and see if, by any chance, he may have been taken among my wounded men."

Raising his voice, Captain Juarez hailed loudly in Spanish:

"Ho the brig!"

"Ay, ay, senor."

"See if Captain Ravel the Pirate is among the wounded on board the brig."

"Ay, ay, senor," and the officer gave the necessary orders.

After a pause he hailed and responded:

"No, senor, only our own wounded are aboard."

"Was there no mistake in burying the dead, and he not have been included?"

"None, senor."

"How many dead were buried from the brig?"

"The passenger and eight of our crew."

"How many are wounded in the crew?"

"Seventeen, senor."

"See if all others are accounted for."

"Yes, senor," came back after a pause of some minutes.

"There is no stranger among the crew?"

"None, senor."

"Now, Castellar, muster your crew, and we will see if there is a stranger among them."

This was done, but the prize crew were all present or accounted for."

"This is remarkable, and yet, senorita, I feel that you cannot be mistaken in your man," said Captain Juarez.

"I cannot be, senor, and he has surely escaped," was the firm reply of the Rover Queen.

"I have to report, Senor Captain, that one of the *goleta*'s boats was missing after the action."

"It had been lowered from the davits, and when I went to look for it I found it gone, so supposed it had drifted away, but now think Ravel, who could not have been wounded so severely as was believed, may have escaped in it."

This was said by Senor Castellar, and Felice remarked quickly:

"That is it; he escaped in that way, I feel assured."

"It is too late to think of looking up a drifting boat now, senorita."

"Yes."

"And he has no sail, oars, food, or water, so that he must soon die."

"Unless picked up by some passing vessel."

"The chances are against that, senorita, in these seas; but he might be."

"Still, you have nothing to fear from him now, senorita," and the last was uttered in a low tone.

"You do not know him, senor, for if alive I have much to fear, not only from him, but from Lamonte."

"Still it might have been worse, far worse," and the young girl shuddered.

"I am ready to return with you to the brig, senorita."

"Yes, and my mother will be anxious," and thanking Senor Castellar in her sweet way she re-entered the brig's boat alongside and was rowed back to that vessel in the gathering darkness.

While Captain Juarez gave the order to again get under way, Felice went to the cabin and told her mother of her discovery.

"I heard the captain's hail to the brig, my child, and dreaded it," answered Madam Chevallo.

But Felice, whatever were her fears, treated the matter lightly and the next day became almost cheerful in her mien.

"I fear I am falling desperately in love with that beautiful girl," said Captain Martil Juarez to himself as he gazed upon the lovely face and form of the Rover Queen.

"I in love with a pirate's daughter," he mused and then he added bitterly:

"And what am I?"

"I have sunk very low in life's scale, and this girl, though the daughter of a pirate, has not done so."

"She is a true, a noble woman, driven by Fate to become what she would have shrunk from with horror had she dreamed of what a destiny might have been hers."

"She has commanded a lawless band, yes, but by inheritance, and her legacy has been crime-stained; but nevertheless she is true, and I am only glad she is to leave such a life behind her."

"She can go among the good and true of her sex and become as good."

"Her face shows what her heart is, and she will never be a wicked woman."

"Never can she be, for see what her mother has been, through all that she has suffered and passed through."

"I only hope that I can win favor in her eyes by capturing that sea fiend, Lamonte."

"She would then have no cause to fear him, for with what a real relish I would hang him up to the yard-arm, and I feel sure it would gain for me besides fame, rank and honor once more in the service of my country."

"As for Ravel I feel that she need have no dread of him, for he cannot have escaped with his life against such chances as he took."

"Well, she can sink the past and live for the future, and I begin to feel as though I would much like to be with her in the future life she must lead, after she has placed the bitter memories of piracy forever from her."

And so mused the young officer, falling more and more in love with Felice with every day that passed.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE PRIZE.

AGAIN we find the two plotters, Banker Luis Escalon and Gambler Henrique Valverde, seated in the former's private-room in his elegant home in the city of Vera Cruz.

A letter had been received by the banker, brought by a sea-captain to his door, and the confidential servant of Escalon had at once sent to the Casino for his master, as the bearer would deliver it to no one else.

Calling to Valverde to follow, the banker had at once gone to his home where he found the sailor awaiting him.

"I was spoken at sea, senor, by an armed *goleta*, whose captain gave me fifty pesos to bring you this letter, as I was coming to Vera Cruz," said the man.

The banker took the letter, handed a second liberal fee to the bearer, and entered his library just as Valverde was announced.

"It is a letter from our captain, Valverde, and the bearer told me that he was spoken by an armed *goleta* and given fifty pesos to bring it to me."

"Then the captain has gotten a vessel?"

"It would seem so; but this letter will tell us," and breaking the seal, he read aloud:

"ON BOARD THE PIRATE PRIZE LADY LAWLESS,
At Sea.

"MY DEAR SENOR ESCALON:—

"I have the honor to report to you that I am writing in what was known as 'Chevallo the Buccaneer's Winged Devil,' afterward as Lamonte's Lady Lawless, and later as Ravel the Rover's *goleta*.

"It is the vessel that was captured by the American officer, Captain Cecil Dare, and retaken by Lamonte.

"The latter was captured again by Captain Dare, and Ravel became the chief of the Lagoon Rovers and equally as merciless a one.

"Believed to be dead, Lamonte, as you know but too well, took to the sea again at your expense; but the Rovers of the Lagoon had sailed for an island of the Bahamas, and all but Ravel's *goleta* were lost in a terrible hurricane.

"In this vessel Ravel began his cruising, and I fortunately sighted him one pleasant day.

"I took to flight of course, and he pursued, his vessel, greatly to my delight, showing wonderful speed.

"He opened fire after several hours' chase, and after nightfall, but I held on until in fear of being seriously damaged, then hove to and awaited his coming.

"He boarded me in fine style, and fifteen minutes after Ravel and his crew were badly beaten and his vessel my prize.

"I found on board two lady captives, who are to sail to Vera Cruz or some other port, for I shall send the *Surprise* to your city under a prize crew, as soon as I shall have gone to Ravel's rendezvous and secured the booty there, which I learn is considerable.

"I found little plunder on the *goleta*, as Ravel had been out but a short while; but the vessel is in perfect condition, staunch, fleet as a bird and splendidly armed.

"A number of the pirates I shall use as my own crew, having suffered considerable loss, and they are only too glad to save their necks upon such terms.

"I have heard of Lamonte's cruising in these waters, and also of Almo the Buccaneer, and now being in possession of a fine vessel, I hope soon to come up with them; but as I return you the brig loaded with booty, I have the satisfaction of knowing that your investment is already cleared and that you will not feel disappointed in one whom you took from the downward path and made a man of once more.

"By the brig, which I will convoy almost in sight of port, I will send later news.

"I have the honor to be, senor, with regards to Senor Valverde,

"Your obedient servant,
"MARTIL JUAREZ."

"Well, Valverde, our man is proving to be a splendid fellow," cried Senor Escalon gleefully after reading this letter.

"He is, indeed, and I have no doubt but that he will run both Urbana and Lamonte down."

"So do I feel that he will."

"It would be a grand thing for him to bring them here and have them executed in the Plaza.

"What a feather in your cap it would be, Escalon."

"My dear Valverde, did you not hear my last instructions to Juarez?"

"Yes, to hang them on capturing them."

"To hang either one of them the moment of surrender, even if they were wounded, for they might escape."

"I heard your orders."

"Now they will not know that Captain Juarez comes under my orders and it is well for us that they do not."

"I told Juarez not to let it be known until the last moment, and if then to simply whisper in their ears that I had sent him to run them down—then hoist them into mid-air."

"Still I think it would be a feather in your cap to have him bring them here."

"It is just the feather that I do not wish in my cap."

"Why?"

"Do you forget that Urbana could tell some very ugly things about you and I?"

"Ah!"

"And then Lamonte could do the same and the result for us would be far from pleasant, so I wished each man hanged as soon as captured, and hinted that it would be as well to show no mercy in the fight."

"Escalon, you have a very nice head, for I had forgotten about what they could tell."

"I had not, and if brought here as prisoners, each, or both of them, their first act would be to send for me to set them free."

"You are right; but now we must live in hopes of seeing the brig arrive in port soon."

"Yes, I shall look for her in a couple of weeks from now," was the reply of the banker.

"But do you know," he continued after a pause, "that, Don Ramon Ravera is coming to Vera Cruz for a few weeks' visit, and then going to the City of Mexico for the season?"

"No; but his daughter accompanies him of course?"

"Oh yes."

"How did you learn it?"

"I received a letter from the Don this morning by special messenger, telling me to engage rooms for him, and also stating that as Lamonte was again carrying on his piracies he feared to leave his daughter at the hacienda."

"He is right."

"So I think, and he hinted as much that he had also come to fear for her on account of Almo Urbana."

"I see, and he is as dangerous as is Lamonte."

"Equally so, and I am glad he is coming here, for it will give me an opportunity of cultivating the fair Rachel, and you know I am interested there."

"Yes, I once heard you say you intended to marry her?"

"I do."

"And how about the American cruiser?"

"Captain Cecil Dare?"

"Yes."

"I do not fear him, for he is at sea all the time."

"But can come to Vera Cruz."

"True, but it will be his last port if he does."

"Ah!"

"Do you think I shall allow an American's life to stand between me and the hand of the richest and most beautiful woman in Mexico?" was the significant question of Luis Escalon.

CHAPTER L.

VALVERDE HAS A PLOT OF HIS OWN.

"I SHOULD think not, Escalon," said Henrico Valverde in answer to the question of the banker if he thought that an American life should stand between him and the hand of Rachel Ravera.

Then the gambler arose and took his departure for his home, for it was late.

"I should think not," he repeated to himself as he walked along the street.

"Nor will I let any life stand between me and my plans," and he seemed very much pleased with some plot he had on hand.

"That man Escalon is as cunning as a coyote, so I must first go home, for I believe he has a spy upon me," and so saying he entered his own house.

But through a rear gate he soon after left the house and wended his way to the Plaza Hotel.

The clerk on duty was but half awake, but aroused at sight of the gambler who often dropped in for a chat with him.

"Any news, Ferero?" he asked.

"No, senor, how is luck with you?"

"Good, so we can enjoy a bottle of wine together."

"Order the very best, please."

The delighted clerk obeyed, and when half an hour after Valverde walked homeward he seemed to be in a very cheerful mood.

His quarters were certainly very luxurious, and a most comfortable bed invited slumber; but the gambler did not retire.

He sat down and mused aloud as was his custom.

"So the Don will be here within ten days, will he?"

"And rooms are engaged for himself, daughter, valet, maid servant, coachman, and footman, and stabling for ten horses."

"The Don therefore comes by the wagon trail in his coach, and not by saddle, which is something to know."

"Still, minds can be changed very suddenly, and it will be best not only to watch both trails, but also to have a scouting party out also."

"In truth, for such a distinguished person it will not be amiss to send a spy to the hacienda to dog his steps until certain of the trail he takes and then ride on ahead and give warning."

"This must be looked to at once."

Turning to a table the gambler hastily wrote a letter in cipher, and then rung a bell.

His valet appeared, dressed, but evidently just awakened, though he never retired until his master did.

"Send Rudolph to me."

The valet bowed and retired, and soon after a man entered dressed as a *vaquero*.

"Rudolph, I wish you to bear this letter to the mountains, placing it in the hands of Senor Miguel himself—no other."

"I understand, senor."

"Bring me his reply within thirty-six hours."

"Si, senor."

"Here is gold for you, and do not delay on the trail."

"No, senor."

"Take your best horse, which you know means that you are not to spare the animal or yourself."

"Si, senor."

With this the man took the letter, put it carefully away and left the room.

"Now I can sleep—it is just two o'clock," said the gambler, and he called to his valet to assist him.

Half an hour after, as innocently as a man who had not a single wrong act upon his conscience to haunt his sleeping and waking hours, the gambler was slumbering serenely.

The next night he was again at the home of the banker, and over their wine they were discussing matters in general.

Not a single allusion was made by Escalon to the expected arrival of Don Ramon and his daughter, and Valverde asked no questions.

He had found out all that he wished already, and the ball had been set in motion in his own interest.

The secretary of marine dropped in later in the evening, and the gambler was at once ha-

tened into the adjoining room, where he proceeded to take up a position for eavesdropping.

"Pardon, senor, for again disturbing you at a late hour, but I just arrived from the City of Mexico, and came for a talk with you."

"Always delighted to see you, Senor Del Blas, not only as a friend, but also in your official character," was the hospitable response.

"I desire to ask you, senor, if you have been able to secure a vessel and dispatch her after Almo Urbana, for news of his piracies come constantly in to us, and he is behaving in a most cruelly brutal manner to all, while we also learn of the lawless deeds of Lamonte the Rover, who managed in some way to escape from his American captor."

"Then, too, I learn of a third buccaneer, known as Ravel the Rover, who has also hoisted the black flag in the Gulf, so that we are almost at the mercy of these three buccaneers."

"Don Ramon Ravera's yacht was taken by Lamonte, and numerous raids have been made upon the coast ranches, not to speak of the vessels robbed by this trio of bold pirates."

"Such is the situation, my dear Senor Escalon, which has brought me again to visit you and seek your aid."

CHAPTER LI.

WHITE-WASHING SATAN.

SENOR ESCALON listened to the secretary of marine with the deepest interest, and then said in his pleasant way:

"I am very glad you have come, senor, for I cared not to make any official report to you, preferring to wait until I ran up to the City of Mexico to see you."

"Then you have a vessel, senor?"

"I have a vessel at sea, Senor Del Blas, and I'll tell you that I placed a man in command of her who has already won my highest regard."

"I have not heard of any officer having been selected, according to my permission to you, senor."

"No, I preferred to send out my vessel in a secret way, not under Government patronage, which would herald her going."

"I believe you are wise in that."

"I am sure that it was the best plan."

"How did you do it, senor?"

"I selected a good vessel, the brig *Surprise*, and purchased her."

"Then I looked out for her commander."

"I found a man who had won fame, but whom a cruel destiny had sent backward again, and was driving him to utter ruin."

"I had him here, told him I wished him to assert his manhood, and that I had perfect confidence in him."

"His whole manner at once changed, and he entered into my plans perfectly."

"I placed him in command of the vessel, with permission to go his own way about the work before him."

"He at once fixed upon a plan, which was to send the brig out as a bearer of valuable freight for New York, and yet carry only a bogus cargo."

"He was to let it be known that she was a rich prize, so that the spies could report it, and then the pirates would be on the watch for her."

"But her armament, senor, for you have drawn no guns upon my requisition?"

"No, Senor Del Blas, my captain preferred to go unarmed."

"He is a remarkable man, or a fool?"

"He is the former, for though he carried a score of men openly upon his decks, he had three score more, secretly shipped and sent on board, below decks."

"They were picked men, too, and had small-arms in plenty."

"Then the brig sailed, and I had last night a letter from him."

"Ah!"

"He preferred to capture his own vessel for cruising, as the brig was not suitable, and he hoped that it would be Lamonte or Urbana who would board him as a merchant craft."

"I see now, senor, his clever plan."

"Instead of either of those two, it was Ravel the Rover—"

"Pirate Number Three, as he is down on the naval list."

"Yes, and you can rub him off the list."

"Has he been captured, then?"

"Ravel has been killed, senor, and his vessel is now under the command of my captain."

"Bravo! bravo! *caramba!* what a man!" cried the Senor Morena Del Blas, with enthusiasm.

"I told you that I knew my man, senor, and more, he has now gone to the rendezvous of Ravel after the booty there, and will send the brig back to this port, she having far more than paid for herself."

"Indeed, yes."

"Then, with his armed vessel, my captain will cruise after Urbana and Lamonte, with every prospect of success."

"Yes, yes, and the blank Letter of Marque I gave you for him you filled up, Senor Escalon?"

"Yes, Senor Del Blas, I did."

"And you say that he is a man you took from the gutters?"

"About that, señor."

"But one who had won a name?"

"Yes, señor, a man who was dismissed from the navy, but who will yet re-enter his name on the roll of honor for services rendered, or I very much mistake him."

"Who is he?" asked the secretary of marine, with some anxiety.

"Martil Juarez," was the quiet response of the banker.

The secretary sprang to his feet in amazement, and while a look of joy crossed over his face, he cried:

"Señor Escalon, Martil Juarez is a kinsman of mine, and it was because he was so that I was more severe upon him, that no man should say that I protected my own blood."

"I shall ask you to keep this a secret, for I shall not report to the Junta who it is yet that commands your vessel; but from my heart I thank you for having given the poor boy a chance."

"I thank you, Señor Escalon, over and over again, and if Juarez is successful in this cruise, he will be welcomed by many back into the service."

"I shall ask for him his former rank, Señor Del Blas."

"He shall have it, señor, upon your request, and he will owe it to you."

"You are a noble man, Señor Escalon, and I have heard over and over again of your great charities, and of the good you did."

"It was knowing of the great soul you possessed that caused me to suggest to the Junta that I come to you upon the mission of fitting out a vessel to hunt down Almo Urbana," and the secretary warmed up more and more in his praise of a man who was as black at heart as either of the buccaneers whom he sought to hunt to the gallows.

But this Señor Del Blas never for a moment dreamed of, though Henrico Valverde, who from his place of listening heard all the lavish praise, raised his hands above his head and laughed inwardly, while he muttered:

"The secretary is painting the devil white—he'll whitewash him into an angel before he is done with him."

"And dear Escalon hears it all so sweetly."

CHAPTER LII.

A BARRIER IN THE COURSE.

THE two vessels—the Mexican brig and her pirate prize—arrived off the Bahama island in the morning, when the wind was not favorable for running in; but Captain Juarez proved equal to the emergency, for he furled sails on both vessels, got the sweeps out on the *goleta*, and the boats out ahead to tow the brig, and thus both vessels ran in.

The half-dozen men left on the island, sick and wounded were delighted at the return of the *goleta* with, as they supposed, a rich prize.

But when a boat was sent ashore, and the Mexican flag went up over both vessels, their joy was changed to sorrow.

But Juarez was as merciful as he was brave, and sent them on board the *goleta* to serve among the crew with their comrades when he decided the time had come to use them.

The brig was then loaded with the booty to be found upon the island, for a great deal had been brought by the *goleta* from the lagoon stronghold, and much more, cast ashore, had been saved from the wrecked fleet.

When the brig was well loaded the two vessels got up anchor and set sail for Vera Cruz.

"I will send the vessel to Vera Cruz, señorita, and the crew that take her in will be my own men, so that you will be known as Ravel's captives only."

"You had best remain upon the *goleta* until we near the port, for I will convoy you within sight of land, as the brig is too valuable a prize to lose."

Such was the plan of Martil Juarez, but it was not wholly to be carried out.

The night came on extremely dark and threatening a storm, and both vessels kept bright lights out not to lose sight of each other in the darkness, which was intense.

About midnight a lull in the wind came, followed soon after by a dead calm.

The night remained intensely dark, though the storm that had threatened did not come.

As dawn broke the clouds drifted away upon an upper current of wind, though the sea remained as placid as a millpond.

Suddenly the lookout cried in a voice that startled all:

"Sail ho! sail ho! close aboard!"

There was no sail in sight, but only a quarter of a mile away, stripped of her canvas, lay a large schooner, also becalmed.

But her men were at their guns and she was ready for action, as could be seen at a glance.

Seeing that she was discovered a shot was fired over the *goleta* and then over the brig in quick succession, to make them show their colors.

At the same instant up to the peak of the schooner went a red ball of hunting, which when shaken out revealed the Stars and Stripes of the United States.

With the flag at the peak was sent up to the

fore her fighting-flag, a black field with a red cutlass clasped in a white hand.

The flag was certainly a very significant one.

"Run up our flag!" ordered Martil Juarez quietly, and then he added in the same tone:

"He takes us for a buccaneer, and I do not wonder at it."

"Go to quarters, men, for he may not have any faith in our colors!"

The crew knew their commander well by this time and went quietly to quarters, while the "Eagle and the Serpent flag" went up over the *goleta's* decks, and then to the peak of the brig, its green, white and red folds getting a faint cat's-paw of a breeze to show them as they were set.

Thus the three vessels lay upon the waters, the crews of the schooner and *goleta* at their guns, waiting for a ripple of the waters to show that they were getting a breeze to fill their sails.

"You do not intend to fight the American, Señor Captain?" said Felice, coming on deck.

"I am not sure he is an American, señorita."

"He has up the American flag, señor."

"True, señorita, and could as readily have run up the Mexican, or English colors."

"Ah! he may then be a pirate?"

"Yes, señorita."

"We will soon know."

"Yes, when the breeze holds we will soon get within hail."

"And you will not open fire sooner?"

"No, for I will not fire upon his flag unless he forces me to do so."

"How was it that we ran so close upon him?"

"The night was intensely dark, and we burned bright lights upon both the brig and the *goleta* so as not to lose each other."

"He saw us coming, took in sail and lay in our course awaiting us; but the calm brought us to a stand-still before we ran upon him."

"There is an American schooner cruising in the Gulf as a pirate-hunter, and it was her commander that rescued the Señorita Ravera from Lamonte."

"Ah, yes, and captured Lamonte afterwards when in Don Ravera's yacht?"

"The same."

"Do you remember the name of the schooner, señorita?"

"The Sea Soldier."

Captain Juarez leveled his glass upon the schooner and regarded her intently for a long while.

Then he said slowly:

"I feel certain that yonder craft is no pirate, for a better disciplined ship I never saw."

"She is trim as a yacht, in perfect shape and a beautiful model from stem to stern."

"She carries a vast spread of canvas and can sail like the wind I am sure."

"Her crew are also in uniform, as are her officers on the quarter-deck."

"She is simply waiting for us to develop into friend or foe, and as long as I keep my flag up and do not fire she will not."

"I have heard that the schooner to which I referred has a figurehead of a soldier, leading a charge, sword held upward."

"Then that is your craft, señorita, for I note the figurehead now," was the response of Martil Juarez, who had again placed his glass to his eye, and he seemed relieved by the discovery he had made.

CHAPTER LIII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

THE suspense on both vessels was great, as they lay there within easy musket-range of each other.

Though the schooner was the Sea Soldier and carried the Stars and Stripes, though her officers and crew were in the American uniform as he could distinctly see, the young commander of the *goleta* did not feel convinced that it was all as it appeared to be.

Those were days of surprises and quick changes of commanders and flags over vessels, and the schooner might have been taken by Lamonte, or Almo, Buccaneers, and be playing a game for further conquest.

Juarez remembered how cleverly he had taken the *goleta* by deception alone.

So he bided his time until at least a ripple upon the waters indicated a coming breeze.

The schooner felt it first, and moved ahead under its impulse slight as it was, for the sails were set quickly when the ripple was discovered afar off on the waters.

The schooner seemed willing to fight against odds too, as she headed directly down toward the *goleta* and laying her course so as to pass between the two vessels and thus, if they proved to be foes, gain an advantage, for they would not wish to strike each other if firing on her, and upon the brig the Juarez had mounted some old guns found at the island retreat.

As he also felt the breeze, the Mexican headed his vessel so as to meet squarely bows on the schooner, and the brig was signaled to follow the example of the *goleta*.

Soon the schooner and the *goleta* came within hail, and a manly voice rung out clear and commanding over the waters in hailing:

"Ho, the lateen-rig ahoy! What craft is that?"

"Ahoy the schooner Sea Soldier!" responded Juarez, in good English.

"What craft is that?" came in a sterner voice.

"The one-time pirate craft Lady Lawless, now a Mexican prize and cruiser."

"What schooner is that?"

"The United States cruiser Sea Soldier, pirate-hunting in the Gulf."

"What brig is that off your port quarter?"

"The Mexican brig Surprise, the captor of the pirate."

"Come to with both vessels and send a boat aboard from each."

There was no mistaking this order.

If refused, a fight must follow, and Captain Juarez was only too anxious to avoid trouble, while he was now convinced that the schooner was not playing a trick upon him.

So he came to at once with the *goleta*, the brig following his example, and boats were lowered from each.

The schooner ran down to a better position, and then lay to also.

In the boat from the *goleta* Captain Juarez went himself, and he was met at the gangway by a midshipman who at once seemed to recognize him, for he said pleasantly, in perfect Spanish:

"Ah! Señor Juarez, you are in command of the *goleta* then, are you?"

"Captain Dare awaits you in the cabin."

"Señor, you have the advantage of recalling a former acquaintance with you, though I confess to forgetting your name," said Juarez.

"I am Mark Cloverfield now, señor, midshipman United States Navy, but when I met you last I was known as Clover, and at that time was a messenger in the Monte Casino at Vera Cruz."

The Mexican officer grasped Mark's hand and wrung it hard, while he said:

"My dear young friend, I owe you my life, for I have not forgotten how you saved me from assassination and extended favors to me besides which I recall most vividly now."

"But though I felt that there was much in you I did not expect to find you an officer upon an American vessel-of-war."

They had now approached the cabin and entering Mark presented the commander of the *goleta*.

Cecil Dare received him cordially and said:

"I am glad, señor, to welcome you, for I remember now that Midshipman Cloverfield has often spoken of you to me."

"But permit me to congratulate you upon the capture of the *goleta* and ask the circumstances of your doing so, for I was in search of this very vessel, along with the outlaw cruisers of Almo the Buccaneer and Lamonte the Rover; but a boat is coming alongside from the brig."

"Permit me to send it back, Captain Dare, as I can explain for the officer in charge, I having a prize crew on board."

Cecil Dare consenting, Mark Cloverfield at once went on deck and gave the order for the boat from the brig to return, and then Captain Juarez told the story of his coming out in search of Lamonte and also Urbana.

"I had heard that Captain Urbana, whom I once had the honor of meeting, had turned pirate, señor," said Cecil Dare blandly.

"Ah, Señor Captain, it comes to me now, the remembrance of your duel with him."

"What a swordsman you must be to have gotten the better of that man, who is known as the Demon Swordsman of Mexico."

"I fought him too, señor, and he nearly gave me my death wound, and I was noted as a splendid hand with a blade."

"I recall the talk of your duel now, and that you gave him a scar across his cheek."

"Señor Escalon, my patron, was your second, I believe?"

"Yes, he acted in that capacity, but deliver me from such friends, for, had it not been for my young friend, then known as Clover the Monte Messenger Boy, I would have lost my life," and Cecil Dare, at the urgent request of the Mexican told the true story of his duel with Almo Urbana and how he and his allies, Escalon and Valverde had determined to take his life between them, if the captain failed to do so in the duel, and thus remove him as a rival for the hand of Señorita Ravera.

Martil Juarez listened in deepest amazement to all, but felt that every word was the truth, and then he told the story of his life, and how he had been befriended by Luis Escalon the rich banker.

"Señor, he has befriended you for his own interests only, and he'll only do so as long as you are useful to him."

"I have never uttered a word against him before, never even told Don Ramon the truth about my duel with him; but he is afraid of Urbana, he and Valverde both are, and hence they send you to capture and hang him to silence his tongue."

"But now let me hear of your capture of Ravel, the Rover, and then we may decide upon a plan to entrap Urbana and Lamonte, for they must be swept from the seas, Captain Juarez,"

and the face of the American officer convinced Juarez that he himself was not the only foe of the two buccaneers, but the American commander was equally so and would prove a strong ally in hunting down the two remaining buccaneers.

CHAPTER LIV.

STRANGELY MET.

"Now, Captain Dare, I will tell you of my capture of the *goleta*, and permit me to say that your kind words to me, a stranger, and the regard of that noble youth, Cloverfield, help me greatly in the new path I have chosen, and be my patron Escalon what he may, I at least will rise once more in my profession."

As he spoke Captain Juarez seemed deeply moved and Cecil Dare warmly grasped, with encouraging words, the hand the Mexican extended.

Since the night when he had, trembling with dissipation, a drunkard and vagabond, entered the house of the banker, Martil Juarez had changed wonderfully for the better.

He was now a fine-looking man, dressed in a neatly fitting uniform and there shone in his eyes once more pride, ambition and conscious power in himself.

It was a bitter blow for him to know what Luis Escalon had been guilty of toward the American, but it was well that he did not know the man in his real light, as it would have almost shaken him in his new-growing confidence in human nature.

In a few words he told the story of his sailing in an unarmed vessel, and the capture of the *goleta* by his strategy.

When he spoke of two captives being found on board the schooner, a Madam Chevallo and her daughter, Captain Dare at once asked:

"Is the young lady's name Felice?"

"It is, senor," and the Mexican's face flushed.

"You spoke of the wrecking of the fleet of Lagoon Rovers, senor?"

"Yes, Captain Dare."

"But the *goleta* was saved."

"The only one of the fleet, senor."

"All the rest were lost?"

"Yes, senor."

"I mean the crews?"

"All, senor."

"May I ask if the wife and daughter of the Buccaneer Chief Chevallo were lost or were on the *goleta*?"

"You know them then, senor?" quickly asked the Mexican.

"Only through my young friend Cloverfield, and he was Lamonte's prisoner, and owed his escape from death to the pirate's beautiful daughter."

"Ah! this is a coincidence indeed."

"Will you permit that he may be sent for to come into the cabin, Senor Captain?"

"With pleasure," was the answer of Cecil Dare, and Midshipman Mark Cloverfield was ordered into the captain's cabin at once.

"Senor, I was telling your commander of my capture of the *goleta*, and spoke of two captives being found on board, a lady and her daughter, when he asked me if the Senor Chevallo and her daughter were saved in the wrecking of the Lagoon Rover's fleet?"

"I trust sincerely they were saved, senor, for though a pirate's wife and daughter two more noble women never lived," earnestly said Mark.

"I am glad to hear you speak thus of them, and I will now be frank in what I have to say to you, for in you and Captain Dare I know that they have friends."

"I referred to the two ladies now upon the *goleta* as captives of Ravel the Rover, and they were nothing else, for Ravel had shown the cloven-foot when the fleet was lost and turned traitor to them."

"He no longer acknowledged Senorita Felice as queen, but endeavored to force her into a marriage with him and also to rob her and her mother of their riches."

"From such a fate I saved her by capturing the *goleta*, and I sought to take the shadow of the past from them by receiving them as rescued captives and as such taking them to Vera Cruz with me, whither I am now bound, or rather was going to convoy the brig in sight of that port, as I cared not to enter a Mexican harbor until I had accomplished my mission."

"The two ladies are now upon the *goleta*, and I have no doubt but that they will be delighted to find in an officer of this schooner an old friend."

"As I will be more than glad to meet in them old friends, and dear ones too," returned Mark.

"Then permit me to ask you, Captain Dare, and Midshipman Cloverfield, to return with me to the *goleta* and meet Madam Chevallo and her daughter," said Captain Juarez.

Both Cecil Dare and Mark gladly accepted the invitation, and all were soon in the boat being rowed on board the *goleta*.

The flag was dipped as Captain Dare stepped on board, and he at once saw from all about his vessel that Martil Juarez was no ordinary officer, and held his ship in perfect condition.

Entering the cabin the Mexican said:

"Senora and Senorita Chevallo, permit me to

present Captain Cecil Dare of the United States schooner-of-war *Sea Soldier*."

The mother and daughter bowed low, and Captain Juarez continued with a merry twinkle in his eyes:

"As for this young officer hiding in the background, I shall not present him to you, as you are already old friends, I believe."

"Oh, Clover!" and Felice sprung forward and gave the blushing midshipman a kiss which made both of the superior officers at once feel envious of him.

Then realizing what she had done she turned quickly, and said:

"Senors, I crave pardon, but this youth was like a young brother to me, and he taught me so much that was good, he was so true to himself through all, that I learned to respect and to love him, and my mother loves him too as I do."

Madam Chevallo had also welcomed Mark most warmly, and then they were anxious to know all about him, and in a modest, terse manner natural to him, he told his story, simply adding:

"And what I am, what I may become, I owe to my commander here, Captain Cecil Dare."

The conversation now turned into what was best for the mother and daughter to do under the circumstances in which they were placed, and Cecil Dare urged against the going to Vera Cruz.

"Too many questions will be asked, too many will have to be answered, to make it pleasant for either of you, and pardon me if I say, madam, that neither yourself or daughter can pass unnoticed even in Vera Cruz."

"It may place Captain Juarez in a very awkward situation also, your going there as Ravel's captives, while if you were landed at New Orleans the case would be far different and certainly better for all concerned."

"He could then readily say that Ravel's lady captives were landed at an American port and no more need be said upon the subject, and it would disarm all suspicion and questioning."

"I agree with you, Senor Captain, perfectly, and I will be far better pleased to land in the United States, for I am a native of that country," and Madam Chevallo showed that memories of the bitter past crowded upon her, for tears came into her sad eyes and her voice quivered with emotion.

"I am glad that Captain Dare proposes what he does," said Captain Juarez, "for now I see that it is best."

Other conversation followed, and then the two captains arranged a plan of cruising which would bring them together again in a couple of months at furthest, so that they could compare notes as to what each had done in finding the two buccaneers.

Then the mother and daughter, with their belongings, went on board the brig, which under an officer and crew from the *goleta*, was to sail at once for the Balize, place the two passengers upon an inward-bound vessel, and then head for Vera Cruz, and report to Banker Louis Escalon.

"Well, Mark, we must bestir ourselves, or that dashing Mexican captain will capture our two remaining buccaneers," said Cecil Dare, as the three vessels parted company.

"Yes, sir, and somehow I feel that the best place to hunt for either Urbana or Lamonte is in the vicinity of Ravela Harbor," was the youth's significant response, and it caused Cecil Dare to start, and after pacing the deck in silent meditation for some minutes, he gave the order to head for Ravela Harbor, on the Coast of Mexico.

CHAPTER LV.

RAVEL'S ESCAPE.

WHEN Ravel fell to the deck in the hand-to-hand fight with Captain Martil Juarez, he was really not wounded, as he had at first believed.

Upon his belt of gold, which he always wore, a bullet had struck with such force as to knock the breath out of him, causing him to fall like one shot through the heart.

At the same instant another bullet had grazed his head, perhaps slightly stunning him, but hardly more than drawing blood.

This blow he also deemed at first to be a severe one.

But rallying quickly he realized that his vessel was lost and his quick wits began to look about for means of escape.

Down into the cabin of the *goleta* he dashed unseen, and was going to seek a hiding-place, when by the flashing of small-arms on deck he discovered a boat drifting under the stern of the vessel.

Quickly he dropped into the sea, knowing that his vessel was lost to him, and swimming to the boat pushed it out of range of the vision of any one on either the brig or the *goleta*.

Then he drew himself into it, and to his great joy discovered oars.

Seizing these he pulled with a strong, quick stroke, only anxious to get out of the way of the foes who had taken his vessel.

He feared that he might be in sight at day-break, and was anxious to place leagues between himself and danger by dawn.

All through the night he pulled hard, and

then as dawn began to break, anxiously scanned the horizon to see if he had escaped from his foes.

Not a sail was in sight and he gave a shout of joy at the discovery.

Then came the reaction when he found that he was at sea alone, in an open boat, without a morsel of food or a drop of water.

He recalled that in the chase after the brig he had run into the neighborhood of Great Abaco, of the Bahamas, and hoped that he had come into the track of passing vessels.

Otherwise he had but saved himself from the yard-arm to die of starvation, or to be drowned, for his boat would not stand much of a sea, he well knew.

So the day passed and night came once more.

He passed the time often by rowing slowly, though at random as he well knew.

He slept soundly through the night, and when the sun arose he found that he was half-famished, still no land in sight, nor a sail.

Toward noon he thought he saw a white speck upon the horizon.

He watched it closely, and at last gave a shout of joy, for it was no hallucination of his heated brain.

It was a vessel rising rapidly and coming directly toward him.

But he also saw another danger, for a storm was rising, the skies becoming rapidly overcast.

Then the wind headed the sail off, when not a league away, and it began to beat.

"It may pass me by after all," he groaned, and raising an oar, with his jacket tied upon the end, he waved it steadily to and fro.

It seemed hours to him before it was noticed, but at last the vessel went about and came upon a tack which would bring her near to him.

The storm meanwhile had become more threatening, and must soon break in fury upon the sea.

Those on the vessel seemed to recognize this, too, for they began to shorten sail.

The strange vessel was a small schooner, lying very low in the water, and with what appeared to be a whale-back deck.

Her masts seemed divided about the center, the topmasts as long as the lower ones, so that when the former were housed she would be under stump masts, as it were.

Her bowsprit could also be shortened more than half its length, and this was done, while the topmasts were housed in a remarkably short space of time.

When the main and foresail were lowered, in their place was run up a leg-of-mutton sail upon both masts, and a staysail forward, so that the schooner was quickly reduced to a small spread of canvas to meet the tempest.

Ravel watched these changes with deep interest.

He felt that he was safe now, for the vessel had answered his signal, and was making directly toward him.

If the storm did not strike his frail boat before the vessel arrived, he would be safe.

The action of those on the strange craft indicated good seamanship, and that her skipper expected a severe tempest.

But what was the craft after all?

He dreaded that it might be a small pirate, in which case he would be robbed of his gold, perhaps put to death, and he began to feel the evil of his own lawless trade as others had been made to feel it.

If an honest craft his story would readily be believed, and he had made up his mind to say that he had been captured by pirates and set adrift in an open boat to die, while his vessel, crew and all had been taken by the outlaws.

As the little schooner drew nearer Ravel recognized that it was having a race with the storm, and he began to feel some anxiety as to which would reach him first.

The sea was becoming very rough, the wind increasing in violence and his little craft was being tossed wildly about.

But the schooner seemed not to mind the waves, cutting through them like a knife, while her decks were swept by the waters.

At last she came within hail and it was in Spanish!

"Aho, that boat!"

"Ay, ay, senor, I am in your hands, a poor sailor adrift," was the reply.

The next moment the schooner swept up into the wind and a boat was towed to Ravel, and skillfully caught.

Then he was dragged alongside, and strong hands drew him on board and his boat too, for the rescuers seemed anxious not to lose it.

A moment more and the pirate captain found himself among some thirty dark faced, wild-looking men who, if not outlaws, certainly had the look of being.

But there was no time for questioning, as the next moment the storm was upon them in all its fury.

CHAPTER LVI.

SOME OF HIS OWN MEDICINE.

RAVEL had just time to spring down into the deep cockpit of the schooner when the tempest was upon the little vessel.

He saw that she met it bravely, and could not but admire the wisdom of the skipper for having her rigged as she was so that she could be put under stump masts, shortened bowsprit and leg-of-mutton sails in a few minutes to meet just such storms as she then had to weather.

He also noticed that her deck was whale-backed, her bulwarks only a high rail from the fore stays aft, and the bows rising high as a man's head, so as to break the waves.

She was long, narrow fore and aft, sharp as a razor in the bows and with her hatches closed could never founder.

That her captain and crew knew how to manage her well was at once evident.

The captain had the helm, and he had the face of a pirate.

It was bearded, wicked and Spanish.

His crew was not one whit better-looking, but all were sailors, there was no denying that.

The storm lasted through the night, the sea so rough that the hatches could not be opened, and hence the crew went hungry, which Ravel felt more than the others after his fast.

Toward dawn the next morning the storm broke and at sunrise the wind was blowing gently, the sea rapidly running down.

Then the captain spoke for the first time other than to give an order:

"Open hatches and let us have some breakfast for I am hungry as a shark."

"How is it with you, mate?"

He addressed Ravel, who responded with parched lips:

"I am simply dying of starvation."

"Humph! you are a healthy looking dying man."

"I have had no food or drink for five days and nights, sir," said Ravel, lengthening the time to suit himself.

"Give him a pull at your rum flask, Pedro, and oil his tongue," said the skipper.

The order was obeyed, and soon after Ravel drank a cup of coffee and ate some breakfast in a ravenous manner that showed he was sadly in need of food.

"Now, mate, what have you to say for yourself?" said the captain, handing Ravel a very fragrant cigar.

"I was commander of a Mexican brig running between New York and Vera Cruz, senior, when I was captured by Ravel the Rover, one of Lamonte's lieutenants, and my vessel taken from me."

"Because I gave him a long chase he set me adrift in that boat, and but for you I would have been lost, so that all of my gratitude is yours, senior."

"You say it was Ravel who caught you?"

"Yes, senior."

"He was a lieutenant under Lamonte, the Lagoon Rover?"

"Yes, senior."

"What is your name, senior?"

After some hesitation Ravel responded:

"My name is Ravera, senior."

"A Mexican?"

Again he hesitated, and then answered:

"Yes, senior."

"And the name of your brig, senior?"

"The—the—the—Felice."

"Ah! named after Queen Felice, the daughter of Chief Chevallo?"

Ravel felt uneasy, for he did not like his questioner.

So he asked:

"What craft is this, senior?"

"The False Beacon."

"A strange name for a vessel, senior."

"Not for this one."

"Why?"

"She is a wrecker."

"A wrecker?"

"Yes; we are wreckers."

"No!"

"Yes; we are Bahama wreckers."

"And you confess it, senior?"

"Yes; we are more honest than you are."

"I do not understand you."

"Well, we give ourselves away, while you tell us a made-up story."

"You doubt my story?"

"Certainly."

"Why should you?"

"Well, I have seen you before."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the Lagoon Rovers' stronghold."

"Never!"

"I say yes, for you are Ravel, the lieutenant of Lamonte."

"I am not."

"I say yes."

"And I say no."

"See here, Senior Ravel, when I was there I was like you, a pirate; but I had no beard then. It was nearly two years ago, and I remember how much you loved Queen Felice."

"For some reason you have been set adrift in an open boat by your comrades or you have escaped from your captors."

"Now tell me if I have not recognized you."

"No, I do not know you."

"But I do you, and so I tell you to side in with us and take a berth aboard the False Beacon. I

need a good mate, and I'll give you the berth, after you have started as we did, with empty pockets."

"I am poor, for I have nothing."

"I felt a very heavy belt about your waist when I pulled you on board."

"Come, there are just thirty-one of us here, you making thirty-two, so divide in equal shares and be my second mate, as I said."

"We have a cargo of booty on board and are running for Havana to sell it."

"Our life is not so dangerous as piracy, and the shares are equally as good, for we share on even terms, from skipper to ship's cook. What do you say, Senior Ravel?"

"I am not Ravel."

"Well, I shall soon know, for the man I recall as Mate Ravel of Lamonte's vessel had done in India ink upon his left arm a group of flags under which he had served, English, American, Spanish, Mexican and the black flag. Strip up his sleeve, men, and we'll see if I am right."

The order was obeyed in spite of useless resistance, and there was the tell-tale mark.

"Now look to his belt of gold, men," came the next order.

This was stripped from about his waist and the contents poured upon a blanket upon the deck.

The eyes of the men glistened with avaricious joy at the sight of the doubloons, onzas, American eagles and gems, for there were diamonds, emeralds and rubies by the dozen.

"I know something about gems, Senior Ravel, so I will divide your riches in thirty-two equal parts," said the wrecker captain.

Ravel groaned and then said:

"You will rob me of my all."

"It is only having you take a little of your own medicine, Senior Ravel."

"Besides, you get your share as the rest of us do, while I give you the berth of second mate, knowing your ability as an officer."

Suddenly a thought flashed upon Ravel and he cried eagerly:

"I'll tell you what I'll do."

"Well?"

"I admit that I am Ravel, and I was in command of Lamonte's old vessel the Sea Arrow."

"She was taken from me by a brig I believed to be a merchantman, but which was a decoy."

"I escaped and lost my vessel."

"The Lagoon Rovers are broken up, and I have a rendezvous in the Bahamas."

"Now make me your captain and I'll head for my retreat, divide my booty with you, then go and get what is hidden at the lagoon stronghold, after which we can cruise as a pirate craft and gain more riches, only don't rob me now of what I have."

"I'll tell you what I will do, senior."

"Well?"

"Take us to your island for your booty, then to the stronghold, and if all comes out as you say, I'll go as first officer, you as captain, and we turn the False Beacon into a pirate."

"And my belt of gold?"

"We will give that back after we have made you captain."

With a muttered oath Ravel was forced to yield to these terms, but he made up his mind to yet be master of the situation in spite of existing odds against him.

CHAPTER LVII.

BORN TO BE HANGED.

"SAIL HO!"

The cry came from the lips of Mark Cloverfield, who had taken his glass and gone aloft to have a glance around the horizon.

In his sweeping look his eyes had fallen upon a sail which had escaped the keen eyes of the lookout, it was so very small.

The young midshipman had at once sung out his discovery and then bent his glass searchingly upon the stranger.

"Ho, aloft!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What do you make her, sir?"

"It was Mr. Cloverfield who found her, sir," answered the lookout, abashed by not having seen the sail himself.

"Yes, I'll be bound he'll see a sail if it can be done with mortal eye."

"Can you see her, lookout?"

"Not yet, sir."

"What do you make of her, Mark?"

"Only a sail, sir, for it's too soon to make her out, but we are, I think, sailing the same course."

Then Mark descended to breakfast and an hour after again went aloft.

The schooner was on her course for Ravera Harbor, and under full canvas bounding along under pressure of a ten-knot breeze.

The stranger could now be distinctly seen from the decks and was a small craft, with low masts and heading almost as the schooner was, though on a course that must bring them nearer together in a few hours time.

As she lay low in the water the schooner had not been seen from her decks, for there was no lookout aloft.

But suddenly men were seen going into the

rigging and Captain Dare who had his glass upon the stranger said:

"She has changed her course, and has been under housed topmasts."

"See, Mark, they are sending the sticks aloft now."

"You will chase, sir?"

"I will, though I am anxious to reach the Ravera Mansion as soon as possible; but that fellow looks suspicious and needs looking after, so give orders to square away in pursuit."

The orders were quickly given and the schooner went flying away at a pace that caused her to gain rapidly, for she had set full sail.

For some reason the crew of the schooner seemed to have trouble in getting more sail set, and she ran along under her lower sails for quite a while.

But at last the topmasts were seen to be in place, a long bowsprit was run out over the bows and the little vessel went speeding along under a tremendous pressure of canvas just as the schooner came within range.

"That is a queer craft, Mark, which you discovered, and she sails like the wind."

"She is certainly holding her own, sir, with the Sea Soldier," answered the midshipman.

"You are right," and Captain Dare set about to increase the speed of his vessel in some way.

The increase was very slight, but yet the Sea Soldier was gaining a little, though so little that all felt the stranger would be far enough ahead to dodge them after nightfall, for rain was threatening.

"Let me try the bow pivot, sir," asked Mark.

"We are hardly in range, Mark."

"It might reach her, sir."

"Go ahead and see then."

Mark went quickly forward, charged the long bow pivot-gun for action, and aiming himself, fired.

The shot was seen to strike the water just astern.

A second shot reached her to starboard.

A third went to starboard.

A fourth was seen to strike her mainsail and a wild cheer broke from the crew at the young marksman's aim.

Then a fifth was fired and struck forward.

"I've got the range, sir, and hope to cripple her," said Mark as Captain Dare came forward.

"Keep it up, sir, you are doing splendidly; though I do not believe the gun would throw two cable-lengths beyond her," answered Captain Dare.

Mark kept up his practice until a wild yell broke from the crew at seeing the stranger suddenly round to.

In fifteen minutes more the schooner ran down to her and Mark was sent aboard in a boat.

He saw but half a dozen men on board, though forward in a heap were as many dead, and the skipper asked sternly:

"Why do you fire on an honest craft, sir?"

"An honest craft would have come to when ordered to do so."

"Who and what are you—ba! Senior Ravel, you here?"

"That is not my name, sir!"

"Ah you cannot fool me," and Mark hastily hailed the schooner.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"The craft claims to be honest, but I doubt it."

"Our fire killed some half-dozen of the crew."

"Ravel the Rover is here, and acting as an officer."

"Ay, ay, I will come aboard," and soon after Cecil Dare stepped on board the little vessel, which was the False Beacon, as the reader has no doubt surmised.

"Well, sir, give an account of yourself," he said sternly to the first mate, for the captain had been killed.

"We are a West Indian trader, senior."

"Search her, Mark."

This was done and her strange cargo discovered along with a dozen men in hiding.

Also a number of beacons were found on board, showing her calling.

"Mark, you have made a valuable capture indeed, for I know just what this craft is; but how your old friend Ravel got on board I cannot understand."

"I'll tell you," was the reply of Ravel with a wicked glance at Mark, and he defiantly told the story.

"Put him in irons, Mr. Cloverfield, and send him on board the schooner, and you take command of this craft as a prize, and follow in the wake of the Sea Soldier."

"If we get separated, you know my destination, so come there."

"I will take the prisoners on board the schooner, and send you a prize crew."

So saying Captain Dare went back to his vessel and soon after a prize crew of two midshipmen and twenty men were sent on board the little wrecker craft.

Just at sunset Mark Cloverfield's attention was attracted to the Sea Soldier—which was sailing along off his starboard bow, by one of his youthful officers, who said:

"He will not escape again, sir."

"No, Captain Dare has obeyed his orders to hang any pirate officer when taken," was

Mark's response as he beheld the form of Ravel the Rover run up aloft, with a noose about his neck.

CHAPTER LVIII.

OVERLAND TO VERA CRUZ.

DON RAMON RAVERA had decided to take no chances where the safety of his loved daughter was concerned, and so it was that he had written to Senor Escalon by special messenger, asking him to secure rooms for himself, Rachel and servants.

The clever manner in which the yacht Sea Arrow had been taken from him by the Buccaneer Lamonte convinced him that he was at the mercy of lawless rovers.

Had Lamonte, at that visit, wished to have kidnapped both Rachel and himself, he could have readily done so.

So the Don concluded to visit Vera Cruz for a few weeks, and then go to the City of Mexico for as many months.

Rachel had rebelled at first, for fear her lover would come, and she should miss him; but her father had urged that if Cecil Dare did come to the hacienda he would learn where she was, and could readily run into Vera Cruz, and if she had left there, make the trip on to the City of Mexico.

He also said that he knew Cecil Dare would be glad to have her away from all peril from a visit by either Almo Urbana or Lamonte.

So Rachel was prevailed upon to prepare for her journey, and a few days after announced herself in readiness.

The Don's family coach, a luggage vehicle, and several riding horses, with five servants, made up the party.

They halted the first night at a ranch, whose owner was known to the Don, and as there were rumors of Henrico's highwaymen having been seen on the upper trails they took the one along the coast.

The second night's halt was made in a pretty glen, and Rachel had out her sketch-book and pencils sketching the scene when suddenly a party of masked horsemen surrounded the camp.

There was no show for resistance, for the Don was resting in a hammock just swung for him by his valet and the servants seemed paralyzed with fear.

"Don Ramon Ravera, I believe you are, senor?" said the leader of the horsemen.

"That is my name, senor, and your calling makes you ashamed of yours," was the stern reply of the Don, while Rachel stepped quickly to his side, her face white with dread, but very calm she was.

"My calling is that of a road-agent, Don Ramon, and in you and your daughter I have most valuable prizes."

"You wish money than for our ransom, so name the sum."

"It is far more than you can possibly have with you, senor, and in fact it is for my chief to set the price."

"You are not the leader then?"

"Only an under officer, senor, carrying out the orders of my chief."

"Well, send him word of our capture and let me know his price."

"Senor, it cannot be done under some days."

"Do not fear for yourself or daughter, for you are in no personal danger, only you will have to go with me to the mountains to await the pleasure of our chief."

"I will give you a draft now for any sum you demand."

"No, senor, if you offered me a hundred thousand pesos I would have to await the pleasure of my chief."

"I will ask you to order your people to prepare for the march, for we must be away at once and pass over the bad trails before dark."

"Are these all your people?" and the highwayman glanced at four servants gathered near and frightened terribly.

"There are six of us here, senor," said Rachel, quickly, before her father could reply, and then she added:

"Why cannot we delay our going until the morning, senor, for I am very tired."

"I cannot oblige you, senorita, as we are not safe in the lowlands."

"You must go at once."

"It will be impossible before half an hour."

"Very well, senorita, you shall have that time."

"Men, surround this camp thoroughly and see that no one escapes."

The robbers had done this pretty well already, but they had been just a trifle late, for there was one of the servants missing.

That one had gone down the glen to gather her mistress a bouquet of wild-flowers, and she was returning when she discovered the situation.

It was Irma, Rachel's peon maid, and she was quick-witted and plucky, so dashed back into cover on the instant.

But Rachel had caught sight of her and knew that Irma would at once run to the nearest habitation and give the alarm, and hence her desire to delay their departure as long as was possible.

CHAPTER LIX.

IRMA'S SUCCESS.

WHEN Irma wandered down the glen, she had suddenly come upon a scene that startled her.

At a spring not far from her were a dozen men in sailor costume, and an officer in uniform.

They were filling small casks with water and carrying them upon their shoulders, hung upon the shoulders of two men, to a boat several hundred yards distant, lying in an inlet from the sea.

There were visible a couple of boats with larger casks in them which were being filled from the smaller ones.

Unseen by the men, Irma drew back, for she cared not to be discovered, and hastened back to tell the Don that men from a ship-of-war were filling casks near the camp.

Upon coming in sight of the camp Irma uttered a slight cry of alarm and sprang back out of sight.

She had discerned at a glance that the Don and his party had fallen into the hands of trail robbers.

Down the glen she ran at full speed to suddenly burst upon the astonished view of the seamen at the spring.

"Quick, senor! my master's camp is near and it has been surrounded by robbers!"

"Quick, senor, and rescue Don Ramon Ravera and his daughter!"

The officer started, called to his men to follow and asked:

"How far away, girl?"

"A short eighth of a mile, senor. Heaven bless you."

"And how many robbers are there?"

"I saw but seven, senor."

"Come, men, all but you Torres, and you stay here and await the captain's coming to tell him that we have gone to rescue Don Ramon Ravera and his daughter from mountain robbers."

With this the young officer followed Irma, who soon arrived at a position from which the camp was pointed out.

The officer acted promptly. In a few minutes the camp was surrounded. Just as the robber leader, too, was ordering the party to move,

"Hold, senor, you are my prisoners!" cried the officer, springing forward, his cutlass in one hand and his pistol in the other.

A cry of alarm came from the robbers, who at once opened fire and tried to break through the line of seamen.

But they met their match. Several saddles were emptied and the masked leader and two men only managed to escape.

"Ah, senor, you have rescued us most gallantly," cried the Don.

"It was due, senor, to the information brought by that young peon girl of your danger, for we were filling our water-casks at a spring not far distant," and the young officer gazed with bold admiration upon the beautiful face of Rachel, who had just been praising Irma for her presence of mind and courage, for the maid had run through the fire to the side of her mistress.

"May I ask, senor, if you are in the Mexican naval service, for though you speak Spanish perfectly your uniform I do not recall?"

The young officer laughed lightly, and was about to reply, when his eyes fell upon a form advancing, and he said quickly:

"I will leave that for my captain to answer, senor, for there he comes."

The one referred to was dressed in a gorgeous uniform, and carried a rifle upon his shoulder, while a string of game hung from his belt.

One look at him, and from the lips of Don Ramon came the cry:

"My God, it is Almo Urbana, the pirate!"

A startled cry also came from Rachel, and all eyes turned, upon the man who walked rapidly up and joined the party.

It was indeed Almo Urbana, the outlawed officer who had become a pirate.

The scar upon his once handsome face had wholly healed, but the red mark greatly disfigured him.

His eyes burned with malicious delight as he said in a mocking tone:

"Ah, Don Ramon Ravera and Senorita Rachel, this is indeed a pleasure to meet you again."

"My gallant young officer here seems to have just rendered you a service, too."

"He has, Senor Urbana—"

"Pardon me, Don, but I am now known as Almo, the Buccaneer—Captain Almo, senor."

"I have heard of your fall, senor, with the deepest of pain; but you have my thanks now for the service rendered by this young officer, to whom our gratitude is due."

"You were captured by mountain bandits, I see?"

"Yes, senor."

"And they would have held you for a quarter of a million at least, while you and your fair daughter would have had to rough it in a wild mountain camp."

"Now with me it will be different, for you shall have the best of quarters on board my brig, which, you know, is a very comfortable craft, and—"

"Do you mean, senor, that we are to go with you?"

"Of course I do, my dear Don Ramon, for you are my prisoners, you, Senorita Rachel and her maid, until I receive in hand for your ransom the sum I will put upon your most valuable persons."

"Your servants, with your vehicles and horses can return to your hacienda, as soon as they give over your baggage to my men."

"Senor Urbana, you are a worse foe than the Mountain Bandits," said the Don.

"Thank you, I like to be called what I am—a thoroughly wicked man."

"Come, Don, will you and your daughter go with me without resistance, or will I have to use force?"

"We will go as we have to do so, without compelling you and your men to place your piratical hand upon us; but may my valet accompany me?"

"Yes, my dear Don, and as I said before, the senorita's maid Irma, and it will be well for you to carry your baggage."

"Men, take hold of these traps and carry them to the boats."

The Don gave a few orders to his servants who were to retrace their way to the hacienda, and they at once departed, glad to get away from the scene.

Captain Almo then led the way toward his boats, leaving the unburied bodies of the dead robbers, which had been robbed by the pirates, where they had fallen.

The boats were reached just at sunset, and they moved down the inlet for a league when the brig came in sight, and that night Don Ramon and his daughter slept in the cabin of a buccaneer, with the black flag waving over them.

CHAPTER LX.

THE RANSOM.

AS had become his constant custom of late, Senor Henrico Valverde had gone to the home of the banker after leaving the Casino at night.

The two men discussed affairs in general, as was their wont, over a bottle of brandy and cigars.

Valverde was becoming anxious to hear of the success of his plot to kidnap the party of Don Ramon, and so said in an off-hand manner:

"By the way, Escalon, I thought you said the Don and his daughter were to come to Vera Cruz?"

"And so they are."

"When do you expect them?"

"They should have been here to-day, I think."

"Well, I confess to some anxiety to see the beautiful senorita, of whom I have heard so much, and who is to be your wife."

"Yes, I am set in that determination— Well, Suzal?" and the banker turned to his servant, whose coming had been announced by the secret ring of a bell.

"A man to see you, senor, and he says he comes from Don Ramon's hacienda."

"Ah! admit him at once."

A moment more and there entered a *vaquero*, whose appearance indicated a hard journey on the road.

"Well, my man, are you from Don Ramon with a message for me?"

"I am here, senor, with sad news of the Don, for he has been kidnapped by mountain bandits."

Both Senor Escalon and Valverde sprang to their feet, the former crying:

"Kidnapped by mountain bandits?"

"Yes, senor."

"My man, tell me just what has happened."

"Well, senor, the Don left for Vera Cruz in his coach, accompanied by Senorita Rachel, her maid, the Don's valet, coachman and footman."

"The Senor Don left word with the manager if certain letters came for him, to send them by special messenger after him, and failing to overtake him, I was to come on to Vera Cruz to you, Senor Escalon, the banker."

"Yes, my man."

"I started with the letters, which arrived the day after the Don left, and I rode hard to overtake him, coming in sight of his second night's camp, for he traveled slowly, just at sunset!"

"I could see it from high ground above, and suddenly discovered it surrounded by a band of mounted bandits from the mountains."

"I saw that the Don could offer no resistance, so I decided that the best thing for me to do was to come right on here and report to you so that a regiment could be sent out to rescue Don Ramon."

"You have done well, just what you should have done, my man, and I'll see to it that the Don and his daughter are rescued."

"You are worn out, so my people will take care of you for to-night, so retire and get food and rest."

"I thank you, senor: but here are the Don's letters."

"All right, I'll keep them for him," and the servant was called and conducted the messenger to his quarters.

When they had gone Senor Escalon looked over toward Valverde.

That worthy appeared as innocent as a lamb.

"Well, Valverde, I am in this game to with you, am I not?"

"To what do you refer, Escalon?"

"Well, I don't like the idea of robbing my prospective father-in-law, but then I suppose I have to stand it."

"Pray explain, señor."

"I say, Valverde, you are as clever a villain as I am."

"I do not understand."

"How much ransom do you want for the Don and his daughter?"

The gambler laughed and replied:

"Ah, I see, you think that my men have captured them?"

"Of course they have."

"My men do not work down on the coast trail, señor."

"No, except under orders from their chief; but don't try and deceive me, Valverde, for it is utterly out of the question for you to do so."

"Well, what ransom shall I ask?" was the cool query.

"What do you think?"

"Let us see what our losses have been with Urbana and Lamonte, and then figure for about twice the sum, or more."

"No, not more, for when you rob my father-in-law that is to be, you rob me."

"Well, we'll double the amount of the losses on those two pirates."

"Agreed; but when did you do this?"

"The night I heard you say the Don was coming."

"What a charming scoundrel you are, Valverde!"

"Thank you, I have had an able tutor," was the smiling reply.

Escalon bowed at the compliment and answered:

"Well, how is this to be arranged, for the Government will at once take action where a man like Don Ramon is held, and his daughter too."

"I'll send a messenger to-night with the price of ransom, and he can do double duty you see, while it will help you."

"How so?"

"Why you can pretend to send him at once, with the money, to negotiate the Don's release, and of course you will be at once repaid by him for what you are supposed to have paid."

"Good! and the Don will thank me for my promptness."

"Valverde, I really have an affection for you."

"So has a serpent for a bird."

"There, don't be uncomplimentary; but let us send your man."

"Of course no money need be sent?"

"Certainly not, for I will explain that to him; but what shall the harvest be?"

"Oh, call it fifty thousand in round numbers as it is the Don."

"But there is the señorita?"

"True, make it ten thousand more."

"I have a higher opinion of her than that."

"Say seventy thousand then for both."

"You forget their servants and baggage?"

"Call it what you please."

"Don't get angry, but you know my men have to come in for a share."

"Let them believe the ransom is but ten thousand then."

"Agreed, and I'll say one hundred thousand pesos, and at once start my man—*buenas noches*, señor Escalon," and the gambler left for his home to dispatch his messenger upon the fraudulent award proposed.

CHAPTER LXI.

A SECOND MESSENGER.

THE two plotters had again met in the Escalon Mansion, and when Valverde entered the library on the following night the banker's first question was:

"You sent your man?"

"Oh, yes, an hour after I left you last night he was on the way."

"Good!" and the banker turned to Suzal who again appeared.

"One of Don Ramon's servants, señor, with news of his master," said Suzal.

Of course he was promptly admitted and it proved to be the coachman.

The man had ridden hard to reach Vera Cruz, and had come at once to the banker, whom he knew to be the Don's friend, or supposed that he was.

"Well, my man, are you from your master, or the hacienda?"

"Señor, I left the hacienda with my master and the señorita, on the way to Vera Cruz."

"I am the coachman, and at the second night's camp we were surrounded by mountain robbers and made prisoners, all but Irma, the peon maid of Señorita Rachel."

"She was gathering wild flowers and saw the surprise, so hastened to the inlet, where a boat's crew were filling their water-casks, and brought them to our rescue."

Señor Escalon and Gambler Valverde groaned inwardly at this, seeing their ransom fade away.

But the coachman continued:

"The rescuing party, señor, were worse than the bandits, for it was the crew of Captain Almo Urbana who has turned pirate."

"Carambas" came from the lips of the two listeners and Luis Escalon became very pale.

Then the man went on with his story, telling about the coming of Urbana, the taking of the Don and his daughter aboard ship, with their servants, and how the rest had been sent back to the hacienda.

"I followed, señors, until I saw them enter the boats, and row down the inlet, and then I mounted a horse, rode to the coast and saw the brig set sail."

"I went back to where I had left the footman then, and while he started for the nearest hacienda, I came in to report to you."

"You have done well, my man, excellently well," and Escalon looked at Valverde, who for once was the picture of despair.

The coachman was then turned over to Suzal, while the two plotters were left to themselves.

"Well, Valverde?"

"Well, Escalon?"

Then they grew calmer, and Escalon said:

"That brute Urbana has outwitted us, after all, Valverde."

"Completely."

"We can do nothing."

"Nothing."

"Where is that fool, Juarez, to let the man we sent him after pick up the Don right on our coast?"

"I don't know where that fool is."

"He'll demand a ransom double what we did."

"He'll do more, if you mean Urbana."

"Yes, I do mean him."

"Who else?"

"We were speaking of the fool, Juarez."

"Don't split hairs now, Valverde, but tell me what is to be done."

"I don't know."

"Nor I."

"My idea is that Urbana will demand more than ransom."

"What do you mean?"

"He will demand the Don's daughter."

"Caramba!"

"So I say; in fact, I cannot find any choice but to do the subject justice, so will keep calm."

"You think he will force the Señorita Ravera to marry him?"

"Why not, for he has always loved her."

"The Don will give his whole fortune before he would allow that."

"Of course, but that does not alter the case, for it will be a wife for Urbana with a fortune, or the fortune without the wife, and he can retire from piracy then."

"How cool you talk about what maddens me."

"I am not in love, and you are."

"Well, we must do something at once."

"What shall it be?"

"I don't know; but there comes Suzal again."

The servant entered, announcing:

"An officer from the brig Surprise, which has just entered port, señor."

"Show him in!" yelled the banker, in a tone which fairly startled the servant, and sent him flying from the room.

Then he turned to the gambler and said:

"Now we will hear from Juarez."

"Yes, and perhaps he is not such a fool after all."

"Perhaps not," and as the words were spoken the young Mexican who had been placed in command of the brig by Captain Juarez was ushered into the room, and the two villains in their eagerness forgot their languid manners and quickly arose to receive him.

CHAPTER LXII.

MATE MICHELIS'S HASTY DEPARTURE.

"Ah, señor, I am delighted to see you, delighted," said Banker Escalon, grasping the hand of the young sailor, who, he remembered, had sailed in the brig as the first officer under Captain Juarez.

"When did you arrive in port?" he continued, after the young Mexican had taken a glass of brandy and a seat.

"Only half an hour ago, señor, for I came at once to see you."

"And the brig is here, safe and sound?"

"Yes, señor."

"Just from the island retreat of Ravel the Rover, as Captain Juarez said in his letter?"

"We left the retreat for Vera Cruz, but changed our course for the Balize."

"But you have the cargo of pirate booty your captain referred to?"

"Yes, señor, and it is of considerable value."

"Of course that is of small matter to me, but did you bring the captives, the lady captives of whom Captain Juarez spoke?"

"No, señor, I put them on board of a vessel bound for New Orleans, which we spoke off the Balize."

"And Captain Juarez and the *goleta*?"

"The captain is cruising for the buccaneers Lamonte and Urbana, and I think with hopes of soon overhauling them."

"That is good news; but how many men did you bring with you?"

"Only twelve, señor, to work the brig, and I hope to join Captain Juarez soon, for we can

take a coaster to where I am likely to find his vessel."

"But who were those lady captives, and why did you take them to New Orleans instead of here?" suspiciously asked the banker.

"In obedience to the orders of Captain Juarez," was the response.

"Ah, yes; but why did he change his mind regarding them?"

"We met the American schooner Sea Soldier, señor, and after a talk with Captain Dare it was deemed best."

The banker started and glanced at the gambler.

"You met the American schooner Sea Soldier?"

"Yes, señor."

"What had Captain Dare to do with a Mexican officer in the discharge of his duty?"

"I only know, señor, that the captives were American ladies, and Captain Dare requested that the brig place them on a vessel bound to New Orleans, and sail *via* the Balize for that purpose."

"This is remarkable, an American officer demanding what should be done with captives upon a Mexican vessel."

"The ladies were not Captain Juarez's captives, señor, but were rescued from the power of Ravel the Rover, and being Americans, they were taken as Captain Dare directed."

"I fear there has been a mistake made, for what right had an American vessel bringing to a Mexican cruiser?"

"We were all becalmed at night, señor, and the dawn showed the schooner within musket-range, and a battle was very imminent, but was averted by the coolness of both captains."

"Now, señor, I have made my report, and am ready to surrender the vessel into your keeping to-morrow."

"See here, Señor Michelis, where is Captain Juarez now?"

"Coming along the coast, señor, from the mouth of the Rio Grande."

"You are a skillful commander, or he would never have trusted you with the brig."

"Thank you, señor."

"Now I wish you to go on board the brig, unload her at once at the Government wharf, and while it is being done you go to the sailors' wine-shops and get a crew of a hundred men, and more if you can."

"I will see that several ship's guns now on the Government wharf are loaned to you, and you must get to sea at your very earliest moment and cruise along the coast toward Hacienda Harbor, for I want you to capture Urbana the Pirate who is in that neighborhood with his brig."

"If you capture and hang that man I'll give you ten thousand pesos, yes, and as much more for hanging Lamonte also."

"Will you undertake the work?"

"At once, Señor Escalon, at once," and Señor Michelis sprang to his feet like a man in deadly earnest.

Five minutes after he was on his way to the brig which was at once warped into the Government wharf.

Twelve hours after she put to sea, with her guns being mounted as she sailed out of the harbor and a hundred men on board, and a motley crew they were.

CHAPTER LXIII.

WELL MET.

THE brig Surprise, under Mate Michelis was cruising slowly along the coast several days after leaving Vera Cruz, when she came upon a vessel running out of an anchorage inshore.

The stranger appeared suddenly, and was ready for action, as a broadside poured upon the Surprise at once showed.

Officer Michelis was a brave man and a good commander, but his motley crew shrunk under the broadside and it was no easy task to get them to their guns to return the fire.

But soon the Surprise did open fire, and as the two vessels approached each other their guns roared fiercely and men fell upon both sides.

Officer Michelis banded his craft well, and did all he could to inspire his crew with his own courage; but they fired wildly while the enemy's aim was true, and bearing down to board the Surprise, her crew hauled down their flag and lost their vessel.

The victor was Captain Almo Urbana, and he was greatly elated over his victory, while he heard from Mate Michelis that he had been sent out by Banker Escalon especially to capture him.

And more, he heard from the crew that Captain Martil Juarez was then hunting for the brig Relentless.

Urbana divided his crew, ordered the prisoners to either serve him or walk the plank, and, repairing damages sustained by both vessels, set sail in search of Captain Juarez.

He had Don Ramon Ravera and Felice on board, and he was anxious to show his powers as a great commander, for his defeat by Cecil Dare still rankled in his bosom.

The opportunity was presented sooner than he had anticipated, for suddenly a vessel came in sight, and a perfect shout went up from those of

the crew who had recognized the American schooner.

"Now see him run like a frightened deer," cried Captain Urbana.

But he was mistaken, for the schooner did not run as he had expected.

Instead her drums beat to quarters, and she stripped quickly for action and came down toward the two brigs, both of which now ran up the black flag in response to a shot fired over each by the Sea Soldier, and her showing the Stars and Stripes.

In addition the ominous fighting-flag of Cecil Dare went up to the fore, the black field with the white hand grasping a red sword.

Captain Urbana was amazed at the daring of the American, but remarked:

"It is bravado, for he will not dare fight us both."

But again he was mistaken, for the schooner came on, and it could be seen that her topmasts were being taken in and the glass showed that her men were stripped to their waists.

"My God, Rachel, that foolish fellow Dare, intends fighting against these fearful odds," said the Don, anxiously.

"See there, father, another flag is going up, and to the maintop," cried Rachel, as a ball of bunting went skyward, and being shaken out revealed a gold star in a field of blue.

"It is our colors, my child, the flag that you worked for Dare yourself."

"Then he has visited the hacienda, and knows of our capture— Oh!" and with the exclamation a ball from the schooner came tearing along the decks of the brig.

The Don seized Rachel and dragged her to the cabin, and thence below the water line, where he left her with Irma while he returned to the deck.

The schooner was now firing with wonderful rapidity and precision, and upon both the brigs, which were abreast of each other and about a quarter of a mile apart.

The brigs returned the fire, but the aim of the gunners could not compare with the deadly shots of the Americans.

The schooner would luff sharply, and give the Surprise a broadside, and then holding on again for an instant would pull off and let the Relentless have the full force of her terrible fire.

Nearer and nearer the vessels drew to each other, and Captain Urbana signaled the Surprise to board, feeling confident if both brigs boarded the schooner the large number of men he could hurl upon her would carry the day.

But the schooner was more nimble than either of the brigs and better handled, for Mark Cloverfield had taken the helm himself, and his management of the beautiful craft brought cheers from the crew.

But why dwell upon the scene of carnage, for dead and dying men strewed the decks of each vessel, and still the battle raged until at last the Surprise was crippled so badly she hauled down her colors, and the schooner at once ran down and boarded the Relentless.

Maddened at his losses and the fact that he was being worsted, Almo Urbana sprung to meet the American captain, who with cutlass in hand met his blade while he cried:

"We meet again, Captain Urbana, and this time one of us must die!"

The cutlasses crossed firmly and only for a minute the hand-to-hand battle was waged, and Almo Urbana fell dead upon his own deck.

CHAPTER LXIV.

IN AT THE DEATH.

"SAIL HO!"

The cry rung out from the deck of the schooner-of-war, and in a voice that startled all.

And no wonder, for unnoticed during the hot action there had a strange vessel come in sight from an anchorage up the coast somewhere, and as she drew nearer it was evident that she was no friend to the Sea Soldier, for above her decks floated the sable pirate flag.

She had evidently witnessed the unequal contest, and seeing that the schooner had won, with a fellow feeling for the pirates, or a belief that much booty was to be found on board, she determined to attack the American in his crippled condition and thus reap a big harvest even if it came to a case of "dog eat dog."

But though the schooner's decks were strewn with dead and dying, though she had suffered much in her unequal conflict, and had not yet had time to put her prisoners in irons, the Americans did not despair, and their young commander cried cheerily:

"We have another pirate to whip, men, and make a clean sweep."

"Yonder craft is commanded by your old enemy Lamonte the Red Rover."

A cheer greeted the words of the young captain, and at his command the prisoners were all driven below decks forward and the hatches closed.

Then, as those on the Surprise showed signs of rising in rebellion at sight of a pirate flag coming to the rescue, the schooner was swung clear of the Relentless and her guns opened hotly upon the turbulent crew.

Loudly they yelled for mercy, but until he

felt that he had subdued them completely Cecil Dare kept up the fire.

Then he opened heavily upon the coming *goleta* and the battle was begun in deadly earnest as the Sea Soldier sailed to meet this third enemy.

Unable to remain longer below, Rachel had come upon deck and joined her father who pointed to the decks and said:

"There lies the body of Urbana, slain by Captain Dare, who against all odds has won; but my God! can he win this third battle?"

"Heaven help him!" cried Rachel and spell-bound she gazed upon the scene of combat.

The schooner's crew fired slowly, but with effect, and the *goleta's* crew rapidly and with little aim; but still her shots told now and then upon the Sea Soldier and her crew.

At length it could be seen that the *goleta* sought to draw out of the fight, and this was proof that she had suffered terribly; but seeing this the crew of the Surprise again became turbulent and a moment after rushed to their guns and also opened upon the schooner.

It was a terrible and critical moment, and the result might have been fatal to the schooner, brave as was her commander and his crew, had not another vessel swept into view around a rugged headland a league away.

And with a bone in her teeth, crowded from deck to truck with canvas, this fourth craft rushed upon the scene.

"There comes aid, lads, so fight to the bitter end!" shouted Cecil Dare, while a perfect chorus of voices cried:

"Captain Juarez to the rescue! to the rescue!"

It was the Lady Lawless, and she came flying to the scene with her men at quarters, her guns run out.

The schooner fought on sullenly, firing at both the Surprise and the Sea Arrow, and following the latter as she again sought to withdraw from the fight at this new arrival.

But the coming *goleta* saw her purpose, and held on so as to prevent her getting seaward out of the crescent-shaped bay in which the battle had been fought.

Then the Sea Arrow stood at bay and fought fiercely, while Cecil Dare, leaving her now to Captain Juarez, turned his guns mercilessly upon the Surprise, until shrieks for mercy went up from the vessel's decks.

"Cease firing!" at last ordered Dare, and he was standing down toward the brig to board, when he saw that a broadside of the Sea Arrow had carried away the bowsprit of the Lady Lawless, while Lamonte's crew were mad with joy and preparing to run the crippled craft aboard.

Instantly he headed for the two *goletas*, and with but a handful of men went to the rescue of Captain Juarez, who had suffered fearful losses in his crew, and could barely hold his own.

But the wild cheer of the Americans as they boarded struck terror to the hearts of the pirates, and this was added to by seeing a human form suddenly dragged up into mid-air.

It was Lamonte, their captain, who had been seized by Captain Juarez, a rope thrown about his neck, and his life ended suddenly at the yard-arm.

After that form had been dragged up over the decks, not a shot was fired, not a blow was struck—the victory was won.

"You gave us the victory, Captain Juarez," cried Dare, wringing the hand of the brave Mexican, who was bleeding from several slight wounds.

"And you saved my vessel and crew, senior," was the quick response. "And Urbana?" asked Juarez, quickly.

"I cut him down with my sword, senior."

"Then I owe you another debt of gratitude," was the response.

Anxious about the Don and Rachel, whom he knew to be upon the Relentless, having put in at Hacienda Harbor, Cecil Dare ordered a boat lowered and pulled rapidly to the pirate brig.

The meeting of the lovers let us not intrude upon, but leave them to their great happiness.

CHAPTER LXV.

CONCLUSION.

THAT the way of the transgressor is hard two dwellers in Vera Cruz discovered several days after the battle of the pirates with the American schooner and Mexican *goleta*.

These two were Luis Escalon, banker, and Henrico Valverde, gambler.

The cause of their death no one seemed to know; but they were found dead in the banker's library one morning, bound in their chairs, and with a goblet of poisoned wine at the elbow of each.

On the table was a slip of paper pinned down with a dagger, and thereon, written in a bold hand, was this statement,

"Luis Escalon and Henrico Valverde were forced to drink poisoned wine to save them from the gallows to which their crimes would have sent them. The following are the charges against them."

Then followed the exposure of the character

of the two men, the one as Henrico, the highwayman, the other as the Simon Haas, the dealer in piratical goods, with all the proofs of their perfidy, of their dual lives and of being card-sharps.

Who their accusers were, and their executions no one knew, for the servants had seen no one enter the house except one man.

Who that one man was no one knew; but it was admitted that he had but done his duty, and done it well, in bringing to judgment two such wicked creatures as were Luis Escalon and Henrico Valverde.

A week after the mysterious death of the two men, there vessels came into the port of Vera Cruz.

The one in the lead was the Lady Lawless, and in her wake came the Relentless, with the brig Surprise following her.

Captain Juarez was in command and reported to the minister of marine who was there at the time.

To the minister he related the history of the battle and announced that the American commander had turned over to him the Mexican brig Relentless, which had been taken from the Government by Urbana. The yacht Sea Arrow the American had given into the keeping of her owner, Don Ramon Ravera.

For his valuable services Captain Juarez was made a captain in the Mexican Navy, and soon after he sailed in his beautiful cruiser the Lady Lawless.

His mission was a double one, for he put in at Hacienda Harbor to attend the marriage of Captain Cecil Dare to Senorita Rachel Ravera, after which he visited New Orleans where he had the pleasure of meeting once more Madam Chevallo and her beautiful daughter, a meeting which but paved the way for many more and ended in his leading to the altar the beautiful girl who had been once known as Felice the Pirate's Daughter.

If the legacy which Felice brought her husband, was a treasure unearthed from the old stronghold among the Lagoons, no one was any the wiser, nor were those who wondered where Don Ramon Ravera found the lovely woman whom he brought, a year after his daughter's marriage, to preside as mistress of the hacienda; but who, I will whisper, was once known as Madam Chevallo the buccaneer's bride.

To a beautiful home on the New England coast, Cecil Dare took his lovely Mexican bride, and resigning his commission settled down to a life of calm enjoyment after the dangers he had known.

As for Mark Cloverfield he still "followed the sea" until he made a name in the naval history of his country, and years after, when an old bachelor, married the daughter of Felice Juarez, she who had once been known as the Queen of the Lagoon Buccaneers.

THE END.

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